

The RI CDHH Commissioner approved the minutes for the 03/19/2014 meeting on April 9, 2014 as corrected.

Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

March 19, 2014

MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Attending: Jordan Sack, Joshua Pila, Timothy Riker, Julia Gold, Heather Niedbala, Todd Murano, James Simon, and Travis Zellner

Commissioner(s) not Attending: David Abell and Betsy Beach

Staff Attending: Steven A. Florio (Executive Director),

Public Attending: Damien Thompson, Alex Laferriere, and Katherine LaMotto Alda (sp?)

Communication Accommodations:

Interpreters: Trisha Geddry (MPA-358) and Elizabeth Nadolski (MPA-358)
CART service: Shelley Deming (Allied Reporters)

Location: Conference Room A at the Department of Administration building, 2nd Floor

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Jordan Sack at 6:11pm.

Chair Jordan Sack announced that the quorum was met after conducting roll call. Chair Jordan asked Steve Florio if Steve received the consensus results from the commissioners for the retreat and dinner. Steve said he did not have information in front of him but would get them shortly.

Review of Meeting Minutes (02/12/2014):

- 1) Julia Gold **made a motion** to approve the **February 12, 2014** meeting minutes as written. Timothy Riker seconded. The motion was carried 7-0-1. (Todd Murano did not vote because he was not at the last meeting.)

Chair Sack asked each Commissioner to talk about himself/herself for 2 to 3 minutes. Jordan started with his introduction.

Jordan Sack:

- Has served on the Commission since 2007, 2nd year as Chairperson.
- Born with a severe to profound hearing loss, communicates via the oral approach.
- Uses cochlear implant.
- Is in his last year of medical school and will find out which residency he is going to on Friday.
- Fun fact: he enjoys traveling and kayaking.

Julia Gold:

- Has served on the Commission since last year.
- Has a son, Neko, who is profoundly deaf.
- Wants to find ways and different opportunities to get involved with the deaf community and advocate for children and families.
- Is an urban and environmental planner for the RI Department of Health managing the climate change program.
- Used to live in Providence for 10 years and went to Brown. Recently moved to Seekonk.
- Fun Fact: she enjoys gardening. Lived in India for a little while in college. Used to know some Hindi but she have lost most of that.

Todd Murano:

- Has served on the Commission since last year.
- Teaches physical education and health at RI School for the Deaf.
- He is a native of Rhode Island.
- Fun Fact: He loves hiking.

Joshua Pila:

- Has served on the Commission since January of this year.
- Is an attorney for a television company.
- Born with moderate to severe hearing loss, hearing aids since he was 5 years old.
- Both of his sons, age 3 and 1, also born with moderate to severe hearing loss and both wear hearing aids.
- Serves Fun fact: He went to the University of Florida which is number 1 ranked in the March Madness so he was looking forward to the next couple weeks.

Timothy Riker:

- Has served on the Commission since January of this year.
- Born and raised in Maryland.
- Has Deaf parents and a Deaf brother.
- Went to Maryland School for the Deaf where both ASL and English had a lot of exposure there.
- Graduated at Georgetown University in Washington, DC
- Actively involved with business for 8 years.
- In 2008, he decided to be more Deaf-centered by getting involved in ASL and Deaf community as well as his career.
- Teaches ASL and Deaf Studies at Brown University
- Is a Certified Deaf Interpreter.
- Provides workshops and mentoring mostly in Massachusetts.
- Is a vegetarian.

- Fun fact, he loves traveling, bicycling, running, swimming, and he did into the triathlon when he was in California.

Steve Florio:

- Born with profound deaf into a hearing family, 3 hearing brothers and no sister.
- His family learned of his deafness when he was about 12 months old after noticing him sleep sound when his elder brothers made so much noise through playing and talking.
- Initially, he was exposed with the oral approach but his mother who happened to be a teacher decided to send me to Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in Philadelphia, PA.
- Went to Gallaudet University for his bachelor degree.
- Used to work for a Fortune 500 company for 9 years before he came to Rhode Island.
- Has been involved and advocated for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues for more than 20 years.
- Has a Deaf family, Deaf wife and 3 Deaf sons.
- Fun Fact: he loves skiing.

Travis Zellner:

- Has served on the Commission for 12 years and used to serve as chairperson for about 6 years.
- Used to live in Rhode Island for about 10 years. Now, he lives in Massachusetts.
- Has a deaf wife, a deaf son who goes to the Learning Center for the Deaf, and a daughter who is hard of hearing and goes to a public school.
- Born deaf but his family did not know until he was 3.
- Graduated from the Clark School for the Deaf and graduated from American School for the Deaf.
- Graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology.
- Graduated from Rhode Island School of Design with a master in architecture.
- Professionally, he is a purchasing agent for a large architectural millwork firm.
- Fun Fact: he has a family home really in northwest Maine. Just had 31 inches of snow there and expect another 6 inches overnight.

Jim Simon:

- Has served on the Commission for about 4 years.
- Is a Rhode Islander.
- Lived in Chicago for 10 years where he was exposed to American Sign Language and the deaf community.
- In Chicago, he became a state screened interpreter.
- Went to graduate school for clinical social work there.
- Moved back to Rhode Island in 2003.
- He is a clinical director of service for deaf and hard of hearing with a private agency.
- He is also an outpatient therapist.
- He has a background in theater and was the reason he went to Chicago to pursue an acting career for many years.
- Fun Fact: He used to live out of the country in London, England for 6 months.

Heather Niedbala:

- Born and raised in Rhode Island.
- Was about 8 months old when she was diagnosed deaf. Her mother and grandmother noticed she was not looking around when people were playing so they decided to take a pot and slam on it. It did not work. Her mother took her to Rhode Island School for the Deaf.
- Was mainstreamed at Community Prep from 4th Grade to 8th Grade.
- Went to East Providence High School and graduated there.

- When she was at RI School for the Deaf, she was involved with everything there.
- Has a 9 years old son and her husband is very supportive when she is involved with the community.
- Works for a home-based therapeutic program and works with deaf and hard of hearing children and their families.
- Fun Fact: She used to own a baby alligator, a pet of hers.

Jordan Sack asked Steve if he now had the information about commissioners' schedule for the retreat and dinner.

Steve reported: The retreat has many date conflicts among the commissioners. However, for the dinner, April 30th worked best for most Commissioners. Jordan Sack would investigate logistics further for the next meeting.

Travis Zellner reminded the Commissioners that because of State's Open Meeting Act, the Commissioners should post public notice of the dinner gathering on April 30th. Jordan Sack reassured Commissioners that this would be done.

Open Government Training - A few Commissioners have expressed their interest to learn more about the Open meeting law. Steve Florio explained that the Secretary of State does offer the Open Government Summit, open meeting act training, at Roger William University two times a year. The next one will be held in August and second is in January. He will share this information with the Commissioners as soon as he finds out the specifics.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT:

1. Chair Jordan praised everyone for their hard work. There has been tremendous work involving a number of meetings with the staff and legislators over the past several weeks including this afternoon for the Ad Hoc Committee regarding the 4th FTE.
2. He and David Abell met with Mi Ok Bruining about assistive listening technology survey. Jordan also met with Mi Ok and Steve on several other occasions regarding the EPCAP survey. He will talk more about this later in the meeting.
3. Jordan met with the Ad Hoc Committee for the 4th FTE and participated in several meetings with the legislators. He deferred the report to Travis later in the meeting.
4. He had new reports from his physician survey that was recently completed.
5. He had discussed with Pam about making changes to the website to make it more user-friendly and easier to find resources. He provided Pam with some templates. He will talk more about this later in the meeting.
6. He regrets to inform the Commissioners that Paul Molloy contacted Steve and Jordan via e-mail that he resigned from the Commission. Jordan relayed that we will miss him and Paul can continue to provide information to RICDHH on deaf-blind issues. Jordan explained that it is not an official resignation until Paul sends a formal signed letter.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

1. Pamela Zellner and Heather Niedbala went to New Jersey to take the Train the Trainer on Deaf Self-Advocacy the previous weekend. Tim Riker was their trainer. Now, Rhode Island has three trainers ready to train the Deaf consumers.

2. Hearing Loss Awareness Postcard that covers a number of activities during the month of May had been mailed out in circulation.
3. Joshua Pila, a commissioner, will be giving a presentation on Federal Communication Commission's recently new rulings on TV captioning on the last week of May.
4. The training for new commissioners has not yet scheduled but hopefully, it will be held before the next meeting.
5. Legislative Updates:
 - o Steve Florio passed the spreadsheet of current status on legislation.
 1. **Senate Bill 2233** – State Courts – No hearing is set yet.
 2. **Senate Bill 2429** – Educational Videos Accessible – No hearing is set yet.
 3. **Senate Bill 2549** – Improved Language for spoken foreign language Interpreters – The Judiciary committee in the Senate assed but the full floor of Senate has not yet scheduled for vote.
 4. **House Bill 7068** – Adding Wireless products to ATEL – the hearing was held but the committee recommended for further study.
 5. **House Bill 7577** – Hearing Aids Mandatory Insurance – no hearing is set yet.
 6. **House Bill 7622** – prohibit selling hearing aids via internet and direct mail – the hearing is scheduled this evening. RICDHH requests for more study since they learned about it one or two days before the hearing.
 7. **A Special Joint Commission on Movie Access** – there is no date for its 1st meeting yet.
 - o Travis Zellner initially **made a motion**. Then Travis Zellner agreed with the **amendment made** by Jordan Sack. Julia Gold seconded. The motion was that the commission is going to study H7622 further and will make a formal decision at the next month's meeting. The motion was carried after a 8-0 vote.
6. Personnel for next week:
 - i. I will attend the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Conference in Jacksonville, Florida (April 13th- April 15th)

Break - 7:19pm

Meeting Resumed at 7:24pm

Follow up on Legislative Updates: Heather Niedbala asked a question about Senate Bill 2549. Steve explained that RIRID and the legal representatives with the Department of Administration reviewed this bill prior to the hearing and agreed that this is specifically for the spoken foreign language interpreters, not interpreters for the deaf, because interpreters for the Deaf have their own statute, RI General Laws, 5-71. Therefore, no further action is needed for the RICDHH to pursue.

Ad Hoc Committee for FTE Staff Interpreter:

Travis Zellner, Chairperson of the Committee reported that the committee met for the first time on Feb. 28th to review all information gathered by the RICDHH office concerning FTE staff interpreter. The committee consisted of Jordan Sack, Travis Zellner, Julia Gold, and Heather Niedbala. The committee agreed to come up with a one-page cover letter to summarize all key points as to why the FTE staff interpreter is critically needed.

March 12th - They first met with Rep. Joseph McNamara. The purpose of this meeting was to get his support and his advice if the committee needed to amend its approach. He was very receptive and supportive of its proposal. Jordan Sack, Travis Zellner, Julia Gold, and Steve Florio were present.

March 17th - They met with Steven Hartford, new director of Policy for Governor Chafee's office, along with Thomas Mullaney and Adam Brusseau, Budget office last Monday. They used the same approach as they did with Rep. McNamara. The response they received was expected as the Governor had already made a decision. Travis Zellner, Julia Gold, and Steve Florio were present.

March 19th - Then today, they met with Rep. Eileen Naughton who is a very strong advocate and is aware of deaf issues, especially those related to children and education. She is a passionate person about deaf education. She was very receptive to this issue. She asked the house fiscal analyst to work with Steve Florio on the dollars. Once Steve and fiscal analysts from House, Senate, and Budget office discuss the costs after a number of negotiations, the analysts will report back to Rep. Naughton who will work with other legislators, both Senate and House sides, to get their support. The meeting with the analysts won't happen until at the end of April or early in May. Jordan Sack, Travis Zellner, Julia Gold, and Steve Florio were present.

SUB-COMMITTEES' REPORTS:

TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE:

Jordan Sack mentioned that David Abell was still on vacation. The Technology Committee has not met since the last monthly meeting. Jordan Sack would like to add that he, Steve Florio, and Mi Ok Bruining did meet and develop a general EPCAP survey. Mi Ok Bruining has already put more than 800 addresses of departments, agencies, and offices over the state (schools, towns, police, fire, hospitals, etc.). Mi Ok will send an informational packet about the commission so they know about the Commission, the new EPCAP program, and how to contact us for assistance or resources.

Jordan Sack shared the concept idea with Steve and Pam that would shorten the navigation on the website to improve ease of access such as re-arranging tabs and more user-friendly topics. Steve said Pam is working on developing the process to collect feedback on the website and to improve the navigation. She has contacted RI.Gov to assist her if re-routing the navigation is complicated. Pam has the list of projects related to the website.

Break – 8:16pm

Meeting Resumed at 8:23pm

PHYSICIAN SURVEY (Chair Jordan Sack):

Jordan Sack expressed his interest in sharing the results of the physician survey and believed it would help facilitate positive change for the hard of hearing and deaf communities. He asked Commissioners if they would be willing to go to Closed Session, as indicated on the meeting notice, since the results are not ready for public release.

Travis felt that the results should not be discussed because the Commission is not involved and because it did not meet the criteria for Closed Session. There was a lengthy discussion on how the physician survey could be used by RICDHH. Jordan Sack and the Commissioners agreed that as soon as Jordan Sack finalized his findings for public release, that the Commission would then re-visit the issue.

Jordan Sack re-iterated that the findings would help bring better services for the hard of hearing and deaf communities and allow for collaboration with other organizations interested in acting upon the results of the survey. He felt that it would be a missed opportunity for RICDHH if it chose not to be involved. Jordan Sack briefly reported that there were about 420 responses to the physician survey. Two quick indicators that he found are that 86% of physicians reported not having any formal training on deaf and hard of hearing issues, and 63% wanted to have more information about deaf and hard of hearing issues.

Jim Simon expressed his interest in re-activating the healthcare committee and suggested discussing the matter in that forum. The commissioners were asked to see if they were interested in serving on the committee.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Damien Thompson introduced himself. He made a suggestion that the closed session shall be scheduled at the end of the meeting so the visitors like himself do not have to leave the meeting room and come back after the closed meeting is over. Jordan Sack explained that the Closed Session was originally scheduled to occur at the end of the meeting, but he appreciated the suggestion.

Tim Riker made an announcement about upcoming lectures at Brown University about Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues.

- April 1st – Dr. Sanjay Gulati from the Boston area who is late deafened about language deprivation.
- April 8th – Elaine Ducharme from Massachusetts who grew up sighted but lost sight later on in her life due to Ushers Syndrome. She will share her experience as deaf-blind.
- Both events will be free to public, sign language interpreters and CART services are provided as well.

Todd Murano expressed concerns about driving a 15-passenger vehicle that he recently learned at RI School for the Deaf. A number of deaf drivers who regularly drove the 15-passenger vehicle in the past are now prohibited because they need a CDL license. Steve Florio will be more than happy to look into this whether obtaining a CDL is challenged by the policy in Rhode Island.

Steve Florio reminded the Commissioners to come with a nice smile at the next meeting for pictures!

Jordan Sack adjourned the meeting at 8:56pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven A. Florio
Acting Secretary