

The RI CDHH Commissioner approved the minutes for the 04/09/2014 meeting on May 21, 2014.

Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

April 9, 2014

MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Attending: *Jordan Sack, Timothy Riker, Julia Gold, Heather Niedbala, James Simon, David Abell, Joshua Pila, and Travis Zellner*

Commissioner(s) not Attending: *Todd Murano and Betsy Beach*

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

Public Attending: *Rachel Baboian, Au.D., President of RI Academy of Audiology and Laurie Duffy, M.S., Treasurer of RI Academy of Audiology*

Communication Accommodations:

Interpreters: Jessica Morgan (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 6:04pm.

Chair Jordan Sack announced that the quorum was met after conducting roll call. Chair Jordan made a note that he moved the **legislative updates** up on agenda to accommodate two people who needed to leave early. He invited two people, Rachel Baboian, Au.D., President of RI Academy of Audiology and Laurie Duffy, M.S., Treasurer of RI Academy of Audiology to explain as to why the House Bill 7622 should be passed.

Rachel Baboian, Au.D.:

- President of RI Academy of Audiology

- Serve on the RI State Licensure Board for audiologists.
- The New England representative for the American Academy of Audiology.
- A private practice in Lincoln, RI

She said she and her organization started the process in supporting this bill one year ago because the audiologists have concerns on these things:

1. United Healthcare established its own hearing aid business based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Their patients are required to order the basic digital hearing aids through its business, known as Hi Health Innovations through online and they will receive their hearing aids by mail, not through their audiologists. If the hearing aids are not functioning properly, they need to mail the hearing aids back to the manufacturers for repairs.
2. The closest audiologist that is approved by the Hi Health Innovation is in Connecticut. No audiologist is available in RI to support this service.
3. The softwares that the audiologists used for programming the hearing aids are not compatible with the hearing aids provided by the Hi Health Innovations. When the patients need to re-program their hearing aids, the local audiologist could not help this.
4. Via Hi Health Innovations, there is no one-on-one discussion or demonstration in person to ensure that the patients understand how to use the hearing aids properly and how to take care of them.
5. The customer service was not available from time to time when the patients need assistance over the phone concerning their hearing aids.
6. All of these above are simply bad services to the patients. They wanted to stop this.
7. They recognize the patients' choice to purchase hearing aids via internet but not to force them to purchase one through internet only.
8. This would pose a serious problem for those patients who have either cognitive disabilities or medical disabilities. They would need audiologists to evaluate their hearing levels and identify the right kind of hearing aids for them.
9. Yes, the hearing aids are expensive and the audiologists make money for their livings. However, this way is the best route to secure the right kind of hearing aids the patients need and to give constant support to patients if they are not satisfied with the one they are wearing. They will work with the patients to come up with the hearing aids at the right prices.
10. About 50 patients who came in her office were forced to order their hearing aids through United Healthcare Insurance's Hi Health Innovations.

Laurie Duffy:

- A private practice audiologist
- Treasurer of RI Academy of Audiology

1. Agreed with what Rachel Baboian, Au.D. said above.
2. She made a point that there are companies out there that people can get their hearing aids through the internet. Then the hearing aids are shipped to a local provider. The patient comes to her, or another audiologist or dispenser to actual fit. So the patient initiated it online, but there is a local person that can be sure that the ear molds are fit properly, the hearing aids are adjusted to meet their needs that aren't too loud to damage their hearing.
3. This approach is still allowing the patient to have choices but it's providing safeguards and consumer protection to be sure that hearing aids are fit properly. So there are still options out there, they just don't want the hearing aids directly shipped to the consumer.

Commissioners had the opportunity to ask questions and Rachel and Laurie answered all of these questions.

(A copy of the QUESTIONS/ANSWERS may be obtained from the RICDHH office.)

- 1) Travis Zellner **made a motion** that the Commissioners need a further study on H.B. 7622 for consideration. David Abell seconded. The motion was carried 8-0-0.

Break - 7:12pm

Meeting Resumed at 7:20pm

Steve Florio reported that there was a big House leadership changes starting from top, the Speaker of House. It apparently affected on our bills of which all of them were not scheduled for hearing. House Bill 7577 was scheduled for a hearing but it had to be cancelled due to both lack of interpreter and lack of CART service at different times. Otherwise, other than that, no activities occurred for all bills to date.

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 was held but the committee recommended for further study.
7. **A Special Joint Commission on Movie Access** – there is no date for its 1st meeting yet.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

1. 4th FTE – the meeting with Jarrod Pimentel has not scheduled yet. I will have Travis Zellner to report.
2. 4 designs left...asked the commissioners to vote on one design during break for our shirts for conference or events where we interact with the community members.
3. Website – Please see the report from Pam Zellner. Pam Zellner is going to form a workgroup to give feedback, ideas, and suggestions as to how to improve the website. One catch...the person at RI.GOV who is responsible to help designing the website for state departments and agencies has left. They are in the process of hiring a new person. Pam Zellner will contact some of you who have expressed interest to serve on a workgroup. It would take time to overhaul the website. Let's aim to complete it by December 31, 2014.
The complaint section will also be improved for appropriate situations and K.I.S.S.
4. The training for new commissioners was scheduled on April 11th.
5. Steve had a productive meeting with RI EMA and agreed that we will host the Emergency Preparedness training for 1st responders in Rhode Island and consumers will be part of the training as well pending an approval from the Director of RIEMA. More information will be available once

we get an approval from the RIEMA. The original plan was to sponsor by our new program, EPCAP, because the training is expensive involving interpreting and cart services, the cost of trainers, and curriculum developed by TDI. The RI EMA is interested to absorb all of these costs so he will see about this.

6. Mi Ok Bruining worked hard to prepare all information into the packets for 800 addresses such as brochures, introduction letter, etc. A few pieces of information including the survey were still under review. The packet should be ready to go sometimes next month in May.
7. He planned to attend the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention conference in Jacksonville, Florida from April 13th to April 15th. RICDHH has been engaged with the RI Deaf and Hard of Hearing Partnership to improve the statewide system for the deaf and hard of hearing children under age 3.

Review of Meeting Minutes (03/19/2014):

- 1) Julia Gold **made a motion** to approve the March 19, 2014 meeting minutes as corrected. Travis Zellner seconded. The motion was carried 7-0-1. (David Abell did not vote because he was not at the last meeting.)

Corrections:

1. Spelling corrections: Dr. Sanjay Gulati, not Muladi.
Elaine Ducharme, not Ducharm
2. Page 2 under Tim Riker: Deaf Centered, not ASL/Deaf Journey

Break - 8:07pm

Meeting Resumed at 8:15pm

Steve Florio announced that the Design #25, State anchor was chosen.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT:

1. Commissioners' Dinner is set on April 30, 2014 at Gregg's Restaurant at 6pm. Each person will pay for their own food.
2. Anyone sent in their bios for the website yet? Only Travis Zellner has not yet done it.
3. After this meeting, Steve will take a picture of each commissioner for the website.
4. He announced that he will be doing his residency at Yale as internal medicine in New Haven, CT. He is very excited about this opportunity. At the same time, he realized it will be difficult for him to fulfill all of the duties as chairperson. So his last day will be on May 21st, our next meeting. Then transferring duties over to Heather afterward. But he will be very sad to step down.

5. He requested that his presentation on the physician survey be postponed to next meeting. The Commissioners were in agreement with his request.

SUB-COMMITTEES' REPORTS:

Ad Hoc Committee for FTE Staff Interpreter (Zellner-Chair, Sack, Gold, and Niedbala):

Travis Zellner, Chairperson of the Committee reported that the committee has not met anyone after meeting with Rep. Naughton and Jarrod Pimentel last month, March 2014. They still expected to have a meeting scheduled for Steve Florio and Jarrod Pimentel to walk over the budget to see if they could come up with a plan for the 4th FTE. Steve has drafted a letter intending to follow up with Rep. Naughton and Jarrod Pimentel. This was where they were at this point. It is important to keep pressure on.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES COMMITTEE (Gold-Chair, Sack, Molloy, Beach):

No meeting was held since last meeting because Paul Molloy resigned and Betsy Beach is out of town until June. The issue was discussed and addressed. Heather Neidbala received the blessing from David Abell to move from the Tech Committee to the Community Resources Committee. Tim Riker is interested to serve on this committee.

TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE (Abell-Chair, Sack, Murano, Neidbala, and Pila):

The committee had nothing to report because they had not met. The major factor for not getting this forward is lack of interpreters. It seems that each time the new dates were submitted for the last 6 months, no interpreters were available. David Abell was very frustrated about this arrangement as he would like to get things moving much faster than what he has anticipated so far.

Lack of interpreters was discussed among the commissioners and they would like to address this problem. The 4th FTE is the reason why the Commission continues to pursue. It would not solve a whole problem but it would eliminate a significant part of a problem.

Steve Florio reminded the Commissioners to stay here after the meeting for pictures!

Chair Jordan Sack adjourned the meeting at 9:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven A. Florio
Acting Secretary