

The RI CDHH Commissioner approved the minutes for the 01/14/2015 meeting on February 11, 2015.

Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

January 14, 2015

MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Attending: Heather Niedbala, Travis Zellner, Betsy Beach, James Simon, Julia Gold, Todd Murano, Nico Sedivy, Timothy Riker, and Joseph Batiano

Commissioner(s) not Attending:

Staff Attending: Steven A. Florio (Executive Director)

Public Attending: Amber Collins, Elsbeth A Brown, Liza Then, and George Herchenroether

Communication Accommodations:

Interpreters: Carol Fay (MPA-358) and Christine West (MPA-358)

CART service: Shelley Deming (Allied Reporters)

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

Chairperson Heather Niedbala called the meeting to order at 6:12pm.

The roll call was conducted by Chair. Niedbala. She reported that the quorum was satisfied. She welcomed Joseph Batiano on the board as he was newly appointed by Governor Chafee to serve on the commission as a Deaf Commissioner.

Review of Meeting Minutes (12/10/2014):

- 1) Julia Gold **made a motion** to approve the December 10, 2014 meeting minutes as amended. Tim Riker seconded. The motion was carried 9-0-0.

Amendments made as follows:

1. Change from "he" to "Steve".
2. Eliminate "Elizabeth" and add "Beach" after Betsy.
3. Removed a brief comment related to family member's memorial service.
4. Add "d" to Heather Niedbala's last name.

Chairperson Heather Niedbala requested to move the subject, Early Intervention Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, up on the list so two visitors can share their insights about the Early Intervention system in RI. The Commissioners were in agreement with Chair's request.

EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING:

Liza Then, State Coordinator of Early Hearing Detection and Intervention from Department of Health, and Elsbeth Brown, Outreach Specialist from RI Parent Information Network.

They shared their experiences in their professional and personal observations:

1. Early intervention service providers are not aware of a lot of services, or, professionals that can provide services.
2. Families are not provided or informed of sign language, offering ASL to families. From the beginning, they understand that they have to provide unbiased information to families. However, the early intervention centers allow the family to choose, but the information they're providing, it's not really unbiased information.
3. It's their major concern that from birth to 3, that's where the brain develops and that's where, and when, they want to make sure the child receives all the elemental stages of their life. It's something they are focused on, it's not something that they're putting to the side, they are trying to make sure that but they try to bring it up as many times as they can in every meeting they are at, they make sure they mention the lack of information that EI service providers have.
4. As the newborn screening program, Liza Then does stop following up with the family. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that she cannot work with them but she wants to ensure that a child that is born in the state of Rhode Island up to the age of 3, she follows any of the needs that they have.
5. Gallaudet University Regional Center in Haverhill, MA offers family sign language services in Rhode Island. Not all EI centers are aware of it. Gallaudet University Center has its challenge too. It has only one sign language tutor available for parents. This means some parents are waiting for their turn to receive sign language service for months and months. There is no other family sign language service available other than Gallaudet University Regional Center and there is no American Sign Language-related resources available in RI for parents and children.
6. Almost all early intervention centers in RI utilize Clark School program that promote oral programs and they do come to their house for services. But nothing for families that want sign language program and nobody will come over to follow up on a regular basis. Where is the balance here?
7. Concerns about human developments especially those children coming from the families that speak in Spanish or in other languages. ASL would accommodate these children more effectively.

8. Gallaudet University Regional Center did not advertise in Rhode Island at least in public looking for someone to teach ASL to families. They need to do a better job.
9. Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has at least two positions, Child Advocates, that dedicated to working with families including EI, IFSP, IEP, advocating needs, etc.

After the Commissioners heard these concerns, asked questions, and discussed, they suggested that the discussion on this subject to be continued under the Community Resources Committee and come up with a plan in addressing these concerns.

Break – 7:07pm

Meeting resumed – 7:17pm

CANDIDATES FOR COMMISSIONERS' SEAT:

Chair Niedbala asked Vice Chair Travis Zellner to facilitate the interview process. Travis agreed to assume the floor assisting the interview process. Zellner introduced a candidate, George Herchenroether, to all current commissioners and explained an overview of the Commission as to what it is about, why it exists, how it is operated, how often the commissioners meet, what expectations of the commissioners, and a brief of its history.

Zellner confirmed that George Herchenroether wished to be interviewed in open session rather than in executive session.

The commissioners interviewed with George Herchenroether for the Hard of Hearing seat.

Julia Gold **made a motion** that the board of the commissioners recommends George Herchenroether to be appointed by the Governor to serve on the Commission as a Hard of Hearing commissioner. Betsy Beach seconded. The motion was carried with 9 - 0. George Hecenroether will be the first Commissioner appointed by new Governor Gina Raimondo if appointed.

RICDHH Officers' Reports:

Vice-Chairperson: No report
Secretary: No report
Treasurer: No report but Betsy wanted to say happy new year!!

Break – 7:55pm

Meeting resumed – 8:00pm

Executive Director's Report:

1. EPCAP: James Litvack, Mi Ok Bruining, and Steve Florio got together to start getting the ball rolling by providing the series of training to all town clerks. They developed a plan by reserving a place such as library, town hall, etc. and invite 3 or 4 municipal employees from the neighboring towns to attend for a 3-hour training to cover basic deaf and hard of hearing information. It will be more introductions to Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues, resources especially on communication access resources for their constituents. They are looking at 10 potential locations for training through June 2015. Once it is finalized, Steve will share the updates with the Commissioners. James Litvack will be focusing on Hard of Hearing, Pamela or Steve will be focusing on Deaf, and Mi Ok is responsible for coordinating supports and logistics.
2. Steve reported that CART service was supposed to be provided at the Governor's Inauguration on January 6th but because of extreme freeze temperature, 16 degree, CART captioner could not do it. Steve did try to work with the Capitol TV to find alternative way for hard of hearing people to follow the inauguration on site but because of last-minute decision, they could not do anything about it. After inauguration, Steve and Pam met all new officials (Governor, Lt. Governor, General Treasurer, Attorney General, and Secretary of State). Particularly Governor Gina Raimondo, when Steve introduced himself to her, she responded right away that she was sorry that she could not attend RICDHH's Annual Coffee last November because she was sick. She will be more than happy to attend next event hosted by the RICDHH. He told her that he will get back to her after talking with the Board of Commissioners about the next opportunity.
3. Steve met with new President Mike Sousa of Hospital Association of Rhode Island and Gina Rocha, Vice President of HARI, to address continuous problem at the hospitals in general, lack of interpreters, lack of coordination, and lack of proactive on their part in the last 6 months. They agreed that RICDHH and HARI will work together to address this issue. Gina Rocha invited Steve to join with the committee that is responsible for policies and protocols at hospitals so they will then work with Steve and develop plan to provide training on an ongoing basis instead of doing one or two-time events like they did in the past.
4. Budget Updates: No update since Steve reported last month. The Budget Office is working with new Governor at this point. Whenever the State of State Address is determined, this is when the statewide budget plan is released to public. At this point, Steve did not know when that will be.
5. Steve reported that he planned to meet with Jim Purcell, Commissioner of Higher Education to discuss about American Sign Language course offered by state colleges and universities. The interpreters and deaf community would like to see ASL elevated to the same respected level as any foreign languages. The proper qualifications for ASL instructors will be discussed. There will be enormous benefits if the ASL program is beefed up.

Legislative Update:

1. **Hearing Aids Mandate Coverage** – No news
2. **POC for 504 Plan and IEPs.** – No news
3. **American Sign Language and English Language Assessment** – No news
4. **Movie Access Commission** led by the House of Representatives was finally held on January 13th. Several representatives were presented (New England Theaters Owners, Motion Picture Association of America, Attorney General's Office, Governor's Commission on Disabilities, and RICDHH). This was more of introductions, members' roles were explained, and what the expectations of this commission going forward. They will meet again but the date has not set yet.
5. **Board of the Examiners for the Interpreters, RI General Law 5-71.** – RIRID leadership did have the opportunity to review the bill at least 2 times where the general community were invited. They submitted their latest version to Steve. Steve requested that the Commissioners to approve the latest version provided that Steve will contact the Helen Keller National Center for better definition of tactile interpreting before submitting the final version to the legislators for sponsor.

Travis Zellner **made a motion** to approve a proposed legislative bill on RI General Law 5-71, the latest version provided that the definition of tactile interpreting should be revised from a number of sources. Tim Riker seconded. The motion was carried. The vote was casted as follows:

Yes: Travis Zellner, Todd Murano, Betsy Beach, Julia Gold, James Simon, and Tim Riker (6)

No: None

Abstained: Nico Sedivy, Heather Niedbala, and Joseph Batiano (3)

4th FTE

Julia Gold reported that she contacted Wayne Hannon of Budget Office to find out what status on RICDHH's budget. Wayne Hannon said there was nothing new or change since the last meeting they met last November 2014. She felt that Wayne was extremely busy working with the new Governor concerning budget issues. It is still up in the air but no words that said RICDHH budget would include only 3 FTEs so hope for the best. The commissioners suggested that the committee tried to write a friendly letter to the Budget office and Governor's office about our position and go from there.

TECH COMMITTEE

The Board of Commissioners were in agreement that this can be hold until a full board members including George Herchroether if appointed to look into this.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Julie Gold reported that the committee did attempt to set up a meeting before the meeting but it did not happen. Therefore, they did not have any activity since last month.

Chair Heather Niedbala declared to adjourn the meeting at 9:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven A. Florio
Acting Secretary