

# Work Group Concerning Issues Affecting Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deafblind Persons

## ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, August 10, 2021

9:30 AM in Zoom and YouTube Live

### I. Convene Meeting

- Rep. Abercrombie started the meeting welcoming members and introducing co-chairs Rep. Robin Comey and Rep. John Fusco.

### II. Introductions

- Rep. Abercrombie thanked the members of the advisory council and community partners (CHA) and the Department of Aging and Disabilities and Disabilities Rights CT.

### III. Overview of Topics to be Discussed

- Interpreter Standards
- Current state law around the standards. Three different types of certifications are recognized: National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and interpreters certified in Massachusetts
- Rep. Abercrombie then talked about the structure of how the meetings will run. Rep. Abercrombie stated that the hope is every meeting the group will take one of the subjects and work on that subject. This way we can bring in experts and have material that we can review, and we will get more accomplished. Rep. Abercrombie then opened the floor to others to see if they thought this was a good idea to do it this way.
- The following members introduced themselves and discussed what they would like to see changed at the state level: Harvey Corson, Chair of Legislative and Education Committee with the CT Association with the Deaf. Marissa Rivera, Advocate Disability Rights Connecticut. Sandra Inzinga, President of the Connecticut Council of Organizations Services for the Deaf. Luisa Soboleski, President of CT Association of the Deaf. Jeff Bravin, Executive Director of the American School for the Deaf.
  - Looking to get a one stop center for their community because they don't have an agency that deals with the registry of interpreters and the services that are provided through that. There is not an agency

in the state that they can reach out to about these resources whereas other groups have that kind of place.

- They also suggested that the State Department of Aging and Disability Services should update their website.
  - They discussed the lack of follow up and transparency there is with state agencies as well as having someone with their expertise at the table when they are evaluating and hiring individuals/companies to become interpreters in our state.
  - They also brought up the issue when a deaf person needs emergency services and often times they are hung up on or not able to be helped, whereas people of hearing are able to receive resources and help.
  - Another issue raised is the fact that children who are deaf are sheltered and not able to get the appropriate education due to lack of interpreter services.
  - It was also brought to the attention of the group the fact that we can't forget about those who have become deaf later in life when they go to hospital. Sometimes they show up to the emergency room and forget their hearing aide.
- Kim Jacobsen introduced herself as an attorney at the Commission on Human Rights that deals with Disability Issues.
  - Jim Iacobellis, CHA Senior Vice President of Government and Regulatory Affairs, stated that we need to be clear in our discussion as to whether there are either 1. Issues with the process of getting people certified as an interpreter or 2. Are there issues once those people are certified. He also discussed the website being updated to be more user friendly. Lastly, Mr. Iacobellis discussed the process as to what happens when a deaf person comes into the emergency room at a hospital (although it is not the same in every hospital).
  - Rep Abercrombie asked the group what portions of the RFP would they have changed? Because how RFPs work, none of us participate in that process. After these RFP go out and the individuals get picked, we have an opportunity to tweak the RFP in the out years, so she asked what in the RFP would they have changed? If VRI works, what other technology is out there that we as a state should be asking other agencies to use?
  - Susan Yankee asked Jim Iacobellis a question regarding hospital settings and clinical settings, regarding what happens if you don't have VRI or interpreter on hand? Ms. Yankee stated that Yale offers a foreign

language certification course to their staff and clinicians and doesn't know if this could be extended to ASL

- Rep. Comey asked about on the ground in our communities, our police or fire emergency and first responders: how do they communicate to our deaf communities?
- Andrew Norton shared that there is no protocol in place currently to have an interpreter in every situation.
- Rep. Abercrombie stated that it looks like we need to investigate public safety. She asked the administrator to look into the statute and protocol for the deaf community when it comes to emergency services.
- Rep. John Fusco said he would like to get to a place where we can have a good start. One of the main issues that stuck out is the issue regarding hospitals. Rep. Fusco asked that if the hospital only contracts with one company and if they don't have someone there, a person won't get an interpreter, which is very problematic. He asked the group to add medical as an issue that needs to be discussed. Rep. Fusco then asked Alvin what his thoughts are moving forward.
- Alvin Chege talked about how members of the deaf community in CT have contacted his office for assistance related to Department of Labor issues, hospital interpreting services, and DMV issues. Most of the issues that he encounters are about communication. He is in the early stages of erecting a one stop shop but it is in the beginning discussion phase. In terms of the website, Mr. Chege stated that he has looked at it to see how it can be tweaked and how they can fill in the gaps.
- Rep. Abercrombie asked the group to see what needs to be done for the September meeting. The majority of the group expressed interest in addressing interpreter standards for the September meeting.
  - Rep. Abercrombie stated we need to look at the statute that we currently have and see if it needs to be amended.
  - She then stated the group need to look at EMS services and if there is a statute around that, and what does it require. Also, what is the responsibility of the municipality when they are called to a home that has a deaf resident and lastly, what do municipalities themselves have to do when it comes to town halls and city halls when it comes to ADA accommodations.
- Barbara Cassin was then called on and stated that Mr. Chege has been doing a great job. Ms. Cassin asked that for the next meeting she would like to discuss statistics surrounding certain areas and experiences.

Getting these statistics will help the group in terms of identifying the services that need to be worked on.

- Ms. Inzinga closed the meeting stating that she had set up a work group for interpreter issues back in March with CHA and with different representatives and offered to send out the summaries from that previous meeting back in March to show the group what they had discussed.