

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Full Commission Board Meeting

Held at – 245 Fallbrook Blvd, Room 035, Lower Level, Lincoln, NE

December 12, 2025, Meeting Minutes (8:30 a.m.)

A. Welcome

In the absence of Chairperson John Culver, Secretary Diane Schutt acted as presiding officer and called the meeting of the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Full Commission Board to order on December 12, 2025, at 8:51 a.m. Vice Chair Richard McCowin arrived later in the meeting.

B. Notice of Open Meeting

Ms. Schutt announced that notice of the meeting was duly given, posted, published, and tendered in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. All board members received notice simultaneously by email. The agenda was kept current at the NCDHH office and on the Commission's website. Materials used by the board were made available in a public folder for this meeting in accordance with the Open Meetings Act {Neb. Rev. Stat. §84-1412 (8)}. A copy of the Act was available for the duration of the meeting.

C. Roll Call

Board members present:

- Ms. Candice Arteaga
- Mr. Roy Christensen
- Dr. Kay Crabtree
- Ms. Julie Mruz
- Ms. Diane Schutt, Secretary (Presiding Officer)
- Mr. Richard McCowin, Vice Chair (arrived late at 9:09 a.m.)

Board members absent:

- Mr. John Culver, Chairperson

NCDHH staff present:

- Ms. Kim Davis, Community Services Manager
- Ms. Jackie Novak, Business Manager

- Ms. Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell, Behavioral Health Liaison
- Ms. Ashley Altman, Education, Youth & Family Liaison
- Ms. Vali Hitz, Events & Programs Coordinator
- Ms. Kendall Couture, Marketing & Communications Specialist
- Ms. Cindy Woldt, Administrative Technician
- Ms. Tiffany Stone, Outreach Liaison
- Mr. Aaron Rothenberger, Outreach Liaison
- Mr. Jeremy Daffern, Outreach Liaison

Sign Language Interpreters: Sharon Sinkler and Ben Sparks

CART Services provided by Don Rombach

Members of the public present:

- Mr. Harry Heafer, Volunteer Hearing Loss Advocate
- Jonathan Arteaga, President of the Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NEAD)
- Vicki Campbell, Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation Services

D. Review of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed with the board.

E. Acceptance of Agenda

Mr. Christensen moved to accept the agenda as presented. Dr. Crabtree seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

F. Acceptance of Minutes

1. Approval of June 13, 2025, Minutes

Dr. Crabtree moved to approve the minutes of the June 2025 meeting, which had not previously been approved due to lack of quorum. Mr. Christensen seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

2. Approval of September 12, 2025, Minutes

Dr. Crabtree moved to approve the minutes of the September 12, 2025, Full Commission Board Meeting. Mr. Christensen seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

G. Chairperson of the Board's Report

1. Resignation of Executive Director

Mr. Christensen moved to accept the resignation of Executive Director Kyle Miers.

Ms. Mruz seconded the motion. Mr. McCowin abstained.

Motion passed.

2. Transition of Executive Director

Dr. Crabtree moved to open discussion of the Executive Director transition document. Mr. Christensen seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

Following discussion, Ms. Arteaga moved to accept the transition document as guidance only, with no changes to policy or direction at this time. Mr. Christensen seconded the motion.

Mr. McCowin abstained.

Motion passed.

3. 2026 Board Meeting Dates

The board discussed proposed 2026 meeting dates. Ms. Schutt moved to approve the dates with the location of the March 2026 meeting to be determined. Dr. Crabtree seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

Mr. Christensen moved to approve the full slate of 2026 meeting dates. Ms. Arteaga seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

H. NCDHH Report (Consolidated)

1. Budget – Ms. Jackie Novak

Ms. Novak reported that FY 25–26 expenditures were approximately 40% of the budget. No immediate budget concerns were identified, though anticipated health insurance cost adjustments and potential voluntary budget reductions were noted.

2. Community Services – Ms. Kim Davis

Ms. Davis summarized outreach liaison activities, emergency preparedness engagement, and ongoing service coordination statewide.

3. Behavioral Health – Ms. Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell

Ms. Yodogawa-Campbell reported on presentations, emergency preparedness collaboration, grant activity, and conference planning.

4. **Education, Youth & Family** – Ms. Ashley Altman

Ms. Altman reported on law enforcement training progress, education advocacy, IEP support, and statewide outreach.

5. **Events & Programs Coordination** – Ms. Vali Hitz

Ms. Hitz reported on Connection Hour, Coffee Conversations & Culture (3Cs), community engagement outcomes, and upcoming events.

6. **Communications & Marketing** – Ms. Kendall Couture

Ms. Couture reported on branding consistency, outreach materials, website redesign progress through OCIO, the Community Spotlight initiative, and internal workflow improvements.

Motion:

Ms. Mruz moved to accept the consolidated NCDHH Report as presented. Ms. Arteaga seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

I. Committee Reports

No committee reports were presented.

J. Old Business

The board discussed committee composition. Mr. Christensen moved to table committee appointments until the March 2026 meeting. Dr. Crabtree seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

K. New Business

1. **Executive Director Kyle Miers' Resignation**

This item was addressed earlier in the meeting under Item G.1.

2. **Appointment of Interim Executive Director**

The board discussed the appointment of an Interim Executive Director. Board members discussed Kyle Miers' recommendation of Kim Davis for the interim role and confirmed Ms. Davis's willingness to serve if appointed. Discussion included the need to address any compensation-related matters separately with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and, if necessary, in closed session at a later time.

Motion:

Mr. Christensen moved to appoint Kim Davis as Interim Executive Director of the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing until a permanent Executive Director is hired. Ms. Arteaga seconded the motion.

Motion passed.

3. Request for Relocation Waiver

The board discussed a request from former Executive Director Kyle Miers for a waiver of relocation expense reimbursement. Board members reviewed applicable state policy and discussed the role of the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) in enforcing relocation reimbursement requirements. The board agreed to take no action on the request, thereby allowing existing state policy to apply.

No motion was made.

4. Interpreter Review Board – Closed Session

Ms. Arteaga moved that the board enter closed session to discuss an Interpreter Review Board matter. Ms. Mruz seconded the motion.

Motion passed. The board entered closed session at 11:50 a.m.

Mr. Christensen excused himself and departed the meeting during the closed session.

Following discussion, Ms. Arteaga moved that the board return to open session. Ms. Schutt seconded the motion. Motion passed, and the board returned to open session at 12:08 p.m.

5. Approval of Designated Use of 2026 Grant Funds for 2026 Activities

The board discussed the proposed approval of designated use of 2026 grant funds for 2026 activities, including clarification of grant timelines, reporting requirements, and distinctions between grant-year calendars and the state fiscal year. Staff clarified that the referenced funding pertained to a private foundation enrichment grant with a calendar-year spending requirement and that grant funds must be used in accordance with funder-specific rules.

Following discussion, staff advised that board approval was not required, as use of grant funds is governed by grant terms and administrative oversight. The board agreed to take no action on this item and defer to staff to administer the grant in compliance with applicable requirements.

L. Public Comment

Public comment was opened.

Mr. Harry Heafer of Lincoln provided public comment regarding his lived experience as a hard of hearing individual and his advocacy work related to hearing loss. He spoke about the use and benefits of assistive listening systems, including portable hearing loops and telecoils, and shared feedback on communication access within meeting spaces. Mr.

Heafer also shared information about the newly formed Lincoln chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), including meeting frequency, topics, and opportunities for collaboration, and requested assistance with promoting the group through the Commission's calendar or communications channels. He further expressed interest in serving on the Commission and was advised that board appointments are made through the Governor's Office.

Additional public comments were provided by representatives of community and partner organizations. Jonathan Arteaga, President of the Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NEAD), attended in support of the Commission and offered organizational assistance and outreach support during the leadership transition. Vicki Campbell, representing Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation Services, spoke in support of the Commission, highlighted ongoing collaboration between agencies, and expressed confidence in the Commission's leadership and future work.

Public comment was closed.

M. Adjourn

Ms. Arteaga moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. McCowin seconded the motion. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

Meeting Dates for 2026:

- March 13, 2026
- June 12, 2026
- September 11, 2026
- December 11, 2026