

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH)

Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting

Final, approved 2.27.2025

Date: Thursday, May 16th, 2024

Time: 2:00 pm – 4:00 PM

Location: 1313 Farnam St. #225, Omaha, NE 68102

Interpreters: Meghann Cassidy and Bethany Koubsky

Minutes: Gina Petersen

CART:

Members Present: Cody McEvoy, Briana Stradinger

NCDHH Staff Present: Kim Davis, Lead Advocacy Specialist; Ashley Wulf, Youth & Family Advocacy Specialist; Gina Petersen, Admin Assistant & Licensing Specialist.

Technical Advisors Present:

Members Absent: Erik Decker, Linda Witmuss

Technical Advisors Absent: Sara Peterson, Diane Meyer, Ronda Rankin

I. Meeting call to order:

Chairperson Briana Stradinger called the meeting to order at 2:02 PM.

Chairperson Stradinger announced the notice of the meeting was duly given, posted, published, and tendered in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and all board members received notice simultaneously by email. Publication of official notice of the meeting appeared in a legal documents, local documents and general circulation in this state, as required by the Open Meetings Act.

II. Approval of the Agenda:

Since quorum was not met, no motions were made to approve the agenda. No changes were suggested.

III. Approval of prior meeting minutes for February 15th, 2024

Since quorum was not met, approval of the prior meeting minutes was postponed until the next meeting date. No changes were suggested.

IV. Discussion:

- NCDHH Updates:

Kim Davis, NCDHH Management Team:

The NCDHH full board is in the process of finding a new executive director. They have contracted with an outside business to promote the position and search for candidates. It will be while before the agency gets a new executive director. Mr. Cody McEvoy asked if there is a deadline for the search, to which Ms. Davis Replied that the governor announced that for all state agencies, any positions that are vacant for 90 days will have that money taken away from the agency. The NCDHH executive director is exempt, but there are two other available positions at NCDHH: the Behavioral Health Coordinator and another advocacy specialist. The the full board is figuring out the process for those now.

NCDHH interviewed and is now in the recruiting process for the new Behavioral Health Coordinator.

Mr. Cody McEvoy asked about the interpreting program coordinator position, to which Ms. Davis replied that the duties have been passed on to Gina Petersen, Administrative Assistant and now Licensing Specialist.

Ms. Briana Stradinger asked for clarification about the governor's order, asking whether they are taking away the financing after 90 days. Ms. Davis responded yes, and that the rule affects all state agencies.

Discussion on the governor's order

Ms. Davis returned to the topic of the new Behavioral Health coordinator, mentioning that she is waiting for them to send their application in for the Mental Health Advisory Committee, and that hopefully the board receives that too. Mr. McEvoy asked for clarification on which position they would fill, to which Ms. Davis responded the Counselor position, adding that she thinks they will be a great fit.

Ms. Davis brought the mental health needs assessment survey to the board as well as the recommendations summary from the previous meeting Any action was put on hold until the new Behavioral Health Coordinator arrives. They will work with one of the board members who knows about behavioral health and hopefully send it out to a larger group.

Ms. Ashley Wulf suggested a discussion regarding what the Department of Justice (DOJ) said about mental health and what the deaf and hard of hearing community can do as a community for mental health issues.

Ms. Davis explained that the DOJ found the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Homestead act. It is still in the process, but the results can be used to ensure everything is accessible with things like interpreters, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), Deaf/Blind Accessibility and DI interpreting. The results could be used as a good reminder on how to follow ADA.

Ms. Wulf posed the question: How many of the people affected by the lawsuit were deaf or hard of hearing? This is something that needs to be looked into. Mr. McEvoy mentioned Emmanuel potentially having some statistics. Ms. Wulf asked if that information could be shared due to HIPAA.

Discussion on gathering statistics.

Ms. Wulf stated that it might be a good conversation starter, to get in contact with the DOJ and ask how they can pay attention going forward. Ms. Davis suggested something like a training or developing a communication kit to encourage them to develop their skills. Ms. Wulf mentioned that the NCDHH Omaha office does have a communication kit available.

Discussion on communication kits

Ms. Davis stated that sometimes inpatient treatment is needed for mental health, and those involved are frustrated with communication access. And the long term patients take longer to complete treatment, and not just because of communication access; the program needs to be designed for their specific needs. Ms. Stradinger added that many clients don't understand what accommodations are needed for them. Many documents are provided in English, not ASL, and the clients read it but don't understand what it means.

Ms. Davis brought up state employees having access to the employment assistance program (EAP), where any state employee can get professional development or even counseling, but the counseling is not effective for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. They [EAP] are contracted under the state of Nebraska, so they need

education as well. Ms. Wulf suggested these ideas be written down for the next behavioral health coordinator.

Ms. Davis announced that the Nebraska Communications Access Fund files need to be changed, explaining that before, it was the Rural Access Communications Fund but on April 1st was changed to those funds being available for anyone in Nebraska for onsite interpreters, VRI interpreters and auditory aids. The American Rescue Plan Act Funding was supposed to be used up by June 30th, but the governor extended the date until December 31, 2024. If fund usage is increased, the budget might extend.

Discussion on ARPA fund usage

Ms. Davis shared with the group that the governor signed the legislative bill to change the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Program (NSTEP) criteria. Before, you could apply once every 5 years. Now it is once every 3 years, and they are now allowing two devices per household whereas before they only allowed one. People are ready to fill out their forms to get their devices, but they must wait until July 18th before it becomes active.

Ms. Davis announced Steve Stovall's retirement from the Nebraska Public Service Commission (PSC). NCDHH's NSTEP coordinator Aaron Rothenberger, point of contact for the PSC, will get the information on who the new hire is.

Ms. Davis stated that she knows a deaf person who collaborated with an agency in Missouri to do great things, like creating a summer camp that allows out of state children to attend. The camp includes activities and education like how to avoid drugs and teen pregnancy. Ms. Stradinger expressed her appreciation for that program and mentioned being impressed by the NCDHH newsletter's extensive list of Deaf and Hard of Hearing summer camps that accept out of state campers.

Discussion on Summer camps for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.

V. Committee Member Updates

Mr. Cody McEvoy described the Deaf Centric Hospital (DCH) event that took place recently. The event was successful, with 30 or 40 medical students attending as well as KETV news. A few outside observers came to watch and were impressed with it. They are currently discussing making this program mandatory for medical students.

Mr. McEvoy mentioned collaboration with the Deaf Thrive organization based in Iowa. Next week they are hosting a discussion about the rights of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people who are in counselling. It is open and free, hosted on Zoom in two weeks.

Chairperson Briana Stradinger shared her update from Vocational Rehab (VR). There are currently ten positions statewide, which is a record. Summer VR camps are available for students to get involved in. Once they've registered there are interpreters that will be provided and paid for by VR.

Ms. Stradinger shared that she set up a meeting with her supervisors to discuss youth leadership camps and possibly getting a grant or funding so that Deaf and Hard of Hearing kids can attend. Currently the cost to attend is very high, and Nebraska has never paid for students to attend, so it important to fight for their access.

VI. Next Meeting Date:

- August 15th, 2024

VII. Meeting Adjournment:

- Chairperson Briana Stradinger adjourned the meeting at 2:54 PM