

Approved on July 24, 2020

**Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Full Commission Board Meeting
4600 Valley Rd, Conference Room 1, Lincoln NE**

March 13, 2020 Meeting Minutes

A. Opening

Chairperson Jeremy Fitzpatrick called to order the meeting of the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) full commission board meeting on March 13, 2020, at 8:33 a.m. at 4600 Valley Road, Conference Room 1 in Lincoln, Nebraska.

B. Notice of Open Meeting

Chairperson Fitzpatrick announced that 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 the March 6, 2020 edition of the Omaha World Herald, a legal newspaper of general circulation in this state, as required by the Open Meetings Act. The agenda was kept current in the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's office and on the board's website. Materials generally used by the Board for this meeting were available in the public folder for inspection by the public, and in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. A copy of the Open Meetings Act is available for the duration of the meeting.

C. Roll Call

For the record, Board Members Mr. Jeremy Fitzpatrick, Ms. Candice Arteaga, Ms. Frances Beurivage, Mr. Robert Feit, Mr. Jonathan Scherling, Ms. Diane Schutt and Mr. Norman Weverka all present. Dr. Stacie Ray and Ms. Sandra Shaw were absent. NCDHH Staff members present are Mr. John Wyvill, Executive Director; Ms. Stephanie DeGroot, Business Manager; Ms. Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator; Ms. Cindy Woldt, Staff Assistant; Mr. Cody McEvoy, Advocacy Specialist; Ms. Kelsey Cruz, Public Information Officer and Ms. Carly Weyers, Deaf Services Coordinator. Interpreters present were Mr. Ben Sparks and Ms. Lorelei Waldron. Ms. Margaret "Mydge" Heaney with Exclusive Reporting Inc. providing CART services.

D. Review of Agenda

Executive Director Wyvill reviewed the agenda with the Board Members.

E. Acceptance of Agenda

Chairperson Fitzpatrick reminded those present for the meeting that the agenda cannot be altered 24 hours prior to the meeting except for emergency items according to the Open Meetings Act.

Board Member Mr. Robert Feit moved to accept the agenda as written. Board Member Ms. Frances Beurivage seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Feit, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka all voting aye. Dr. Stacie Ray and Ms. Sandra Shaw were absent.

F. Acceptance of Minutes

Chairperson Fitzpatrick asked for changes or corrections to the December 13, 2019 meeting minutes.

Board Member, Mr. Norman Weverka, moved to accept the minutes as written. Board Member Mr. Jonathan Scherling seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka all voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw and Dr Stacie Ray were absent. Mr. Robert Feit abstained.

G. Chairperson of the Board Report

a. Public Comments

Went on with agenda items G.2; G.3; G.4 first.

Chairperson Jeremy Fitzpatrick thanked all of the visitors who were in attendance for the meeting. Asked those in attendance to limit their comments to a minute or two.

Dr. Julie Delkamiller with University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) – Dr. Delkamiller thanked the board for their work on the passing of Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) and American Sign Language (ASL). Dr. Delkamiller shared that UNO can't seek accreditation through the interpreter training program as that has been shut down for funding reasons, adding that it costs about \$10,000 to seek accreditation. Discussion regarding State Licensing and National Certification of sign language interpreters when they are finished with the interpreter training program at UNO.

Chairperson Fitzpatrick asked Dr. Delkamiller what her top 5 wish list items for the interpreter training program. Per Dr Delkamiller 1). To have funding for deaf and sign language interpreting mentors. 2). To have a different professor than herself. 3). To be able to seek accreditation.

Discussion on what it would take to get accredited.

Discussion on the activities that her current group of students at UNO are doing.

Ms. Harley Augensen spoke on behalf of the Interpreter and Deaf Education Students in attendance from UNO. Ms. Augensen read the statement listed at the end of the minutes as attachment 1. This is a list of the students that were in attendance at the meeting 1). Michelle Cauffman, 2). Tiffany Welton, 3). Jackson Munchrath, 4). Hannah Swanda, 5). Harley Augensen, 6). Abigail Johnson, 7). Medicine flower Blue Star, 8). Monique Weishampel, 9). Christina Finger, 10). Joy Cotton, 11). Julie Christensen, 12). Seth Nelson, 13). Lily Hanke, 14). Danielle Shafer, 15). Andrea Wisniewski, 16). Morgan Miller, 17). Jeffrey Conger, 18). Paige Volcek, 19). Kelsey Sterns, 20). Seiko Ito, 21). Kolten Schnack, 22). Elizabeth "Libbie" Miller.

Chairperson Jeremy Fitzpatrick thanked all of the students for attending. He reiterated the fact that NCDHH values their comments, and wants to see and hear from them.

Conversation between the board members on how NCDHH can support these students and their passion for becoming a sign language interpreter, or deaf educator.

Ms. Ronda Rankin, community interpreter specializing in healthcare interpreting – Ms. Rankin is also a practicum supervisor at UNO for three practicum students. Ms. Rankin shared with the group that this group of students is providing a workshop series at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) for students. Conversation on the history of this workshop series and how it was developed.

Mrs. Tami Richardson – Nelson, Vice Chairperson of the Nebraska Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) Committee. Mrs. Richardson – Nelson shared that members of the community have come to her stating that they would like to have two things changed regarding the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program (NSTEP). The first change that the community is requesting is the “one person per household” stipulation, would like to see this changed to two people per household. The second request is to change so that the individuals can reapply once every three years instead of once every five years for a wireless devices. Noting that they are suggesting that other equipment options stay at being able to reapply once every five years. Mrs. Richardson – Nelson is circulating a petition to serve as documentation from members of the Deaf, Deaf Blind, Hard of Hearing, and Speech Impaired Nebraskan’s. They are requesting that NCDHH make this a high propriety bill for next year’s Legislation. A copy of what was handed out at the board meeting will be listed at the end of the minutes as attachment 2.

Discussion on where the funds would come from to pay for these changes to the NSTEP.

Chairperson Fitzpatrick asked Director Wyvill to report back to the board on this at the next meeting.

break from 9:50am – 10am

moved to G.5.

b. Chairperson’s Report

Chairperson Fitzpatrick commented on the issue that is currently touching all of us, the Coronavirus. Encouraging that the agency develops a plan on how we are going to move forward. Asking Director Wyvill to stay in touch with the State of Nebraska to get any guidance on what we should do. Director Wyvill commented that the agency has already started internal discussions regarding this. Individuals in all of the offices are prepared to work at home if necessary, depending on what the Governor does in terms of state offices. Director Wyvill also added that the agency has been preparing to limit interaction with the general public, also added that the bigger, more troubling issue that we have to do for advocacy is the lack of communication access with public officials that are holding press conferences. Adding that NCDHH is also reaching out to the Department of Education to address accessibility issues with

students beginning to work from home.

Additional discussion on Coronavirus

c. Distinguished Service Award Presentation

Chairperson Fitzpatrick shared that Dr. Marc Brennan was not able to be present today to present to him a plaque for appreciation for his services. This will be completed at a later date.

d. 2019 Annual Report

Chairperson Fitzpatrick gave praise to the state that NCDHH is currently in, recapping that we passed the hearing aid bill for children. In addition we are on the verge of passing a bill to recognize sign language as an official language for the state, as well as LEAD-K.

Board Member, Mr. Robert Feit, moved to accept the 2019 Annual Report as presented. Board Member Ms. Diane Schutt seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Feit, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka all voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw and Dr Stacie Ray were absent.

Dr. Stacie Ray entered the meeting at 8:53am

e. Election of new Secretary

Mr. Robert “Bob” Feit nominated Dr. Stacie Ray.

Discussion between the members.

Board Member Mr. Robert Feit moved to have Dr. Stacie Ray as the Board Secretary. Board Member Ms. Frances Beurivage seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Feit, Dr. Ray, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka all voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw is absent.

f. Executive Director – NCDHH Personnel Report Update

Board Member, Mr. Norman Weverka made the motion to go into closed session at 10:05am. Board Member Ms. Diane Schutt seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Feit, Dr. Ray, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka all voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw was absent.

Closed Session

Board Member, Mr. Robert Feit made the motion to go out of closed session at 10:18am. Board Member Ms. Diane Schutt seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Feit, Dr. Ray, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka all voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw was absent.

Chairperson Fitzpatrick reported that the board met in closed session with Director Wyvill to

discuss personnel issues, and no action was taken.

g. NCDHH Rules and Regulations

Director John Wyvill shared with the board the draft Rules and Regulations that NCDHH is recommending from a staff perspective and an Interpreter Review Board (IRB) perspective to move forward in the rule making process with no additional changes or modifications.

Director Wyvill gave the board members the history of why the Rules and Regulations were opened back up and what took place. Chairperson Jeremy Fitzpatrick asked the question – “The regulations don’t currently address provisional licensure; is that correct?” Director Wyvill added that was correct. Chairperson Fitzpatrick also asked if the regulations included the topic of NCDHH adopting a standard operating procedure (sop) when handling interpreter complaints. Director Wyvill replied no.

Director Wyvill went on to explain that the Quality Assurance Screening Test (QAST) 3 was the stepping stone in the process for provisional licensure. With QAST 3 no longer in our rules and regulations, or licensure requirement; this meaning there is no context for provisional licensure.

Discussion on when complaints are filed that do not have merit.

Board Member, Mr. Robert Feit made the motion to adopt the Rules and Regulations as presented. Board Member Ms. Diane Schutt seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beaurivage, Mr. Feit, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka voting aye. Ms. Shaw and Dr. Stacie Ray were absent.

Discussion between the members regarding if other professions have an unfounded complaint, what is the SOP that removes the complaint before it advances for full review.

h. License Informal Complaint Review

Board Member, Ms. Frances Beaurivage made the motion to go into closed session at 10:34 am. Board Member Mr. Jonathan Scherling seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beaurivage, Mr. Robert Feit, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka all voting aye. Ms. Shaw and Dr. Stacie Ray were absent.

Closed Session

Board Member, Mr. Robert Feit made the motion to go into open session at 11:53am. Board Member Mr. Norman Weverka seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beaurivage, Mr. Robert Feit, Dr. Ray, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw was absent.

The board members are recommending to NCDHH to implement the below 3 step process when dealing with interpreter complaints.

1. There should be no communication with the interpreter after the complaint has been filed other than relating to that complaint until it's resolved.
2. Any NCDHH staff involved should recuse themselves from the investigation.
3. Complaint should be securely stored

Regarding Case # 2520 and Case # 2521 -- Board Member, Mr. Robert Feit made the motion to approve the IRB's motion to refer informal complaint cases 2520 and 2521, and move to a formal complaint to have the interpreter's license revoked for two years. Board Member Mr. Norman Weverka seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beaurivage, Mr. Feit, Dr. Ray, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt and Mr. Weverka voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw was absent.

i. Legislative Update

Director John Wyvill shared with the board that the LEAD-K and the ASL bill has been consolidated to one bill. Director Wyvill gave a recap of the recent hearing that was held including all who testified, also adding about comments from Senator Wishart and Senator McDonnell. This bill is currently designated as a Speaker Priority Bill, which is one of twenty five bills. Director Wyvill gave credit to Dr. Peter Seiler and Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD) for the progress that this bill has made.

Chairperson Fitzpatrick gave praise to Director Wyvill and the NCDHH staff on all that has been accomplished.

Discussion on what would be involved with the LEAD-K board requirements.

H. Executive Director Report

a. Access to Healthcare Update

Director John Wyvill invited Ms. Carly Weyers, Deaf Services Coordinator; and Mr. Cody McEvoy, Advocacy Specialist to report to the board on the work they have completed.

Ms. Weyers shared with the board about the previous Town Hall Meeting that was held at the Omaha Association for the Deaf (OAD) Hall with the Chief Medical Officer with the State of Nebraska. This was well received by many of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers who attended.

Ms. Weyers and Mr. McEvoy are also working with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) Conference coming up in July. How can they bring that information, and those concerns from a national level and bring them back to Nebraska.

The two of them will be having various Facebook (FB) Live events that will give the Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens in Nebraska a chance to participate if they would like. They are hoping to have the FB Live event on either May 2 or May 3, or possibly a weekend.

On a monthly basis, Ms. Weyers and Mr. McEvoy will continue with Coffee with Cody and Carly

Mr. McEvoy shared that once they return from the NAD Conference they would like to have a workshop or town hall to discuss what they have learned. This would allow NCDHH to share with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities on ways you can advocate for yourself.

Mr. McEvoy shared that we can change the concepts if needed, we are just trying to develop the first step.

b. Town Hall Meeting in Kearney

Director Wyvill reminded the members that at this time the June board meeting will be held in Kearney with a Town Hall Meeting the night before. Given this is all dependent on the current situation with Coronavirus. The Town Hall Meeting and the Board Meeting will be held at the Best Western Plus in Kearney.

c. Budget – Biennial Report Process

Director John Wyvill referenced what was given to the members in their board packet. Noting that the agency is currently under budget. Director Wyvill will be reaching out to the Executive Committee in the near future to discuss what the board priorities will be. The end of this fiscal year will be on June 30, 2020; giving us one more additional year for the current budget that is in place.

d. Bi-Weekly Reports

Director John Wyvill referenced the copies of his bi-weekly reports that he emails to the board members.

e. Advocacy Specialist’s Top Ten Report

Director John Wyvill shared that the NCDHH staff have submitted their Top Ten Reports that have taken place since the previous board meeting.

f. Marketing Report

Ms. Kelsey Cruz, Public Information Officer gave a recap of the report that she submitted for the board packets. Touching base on the next Salt Dogs Game will be on July 7th, and that the previous Coffee with the Cops in Lincoln was an exceptional event. Ms. Cruz also mentioned the live press conferences taking place having a sign language interpreter available. The Agency is working with the government agencies to assure that the proper access is available.

Director John Wyvill added with the success in Lincoln with the Coffee with the Cops event that Mr. Dillon Curren, Advocacy Specialist in Omaha is working on having this in Omaha as well.

g. Out of State Travel Request

a. National Association of the Deaf (NAD)

Director Wyvill shared that he would like approval for two staff members and himself to attend the NAD Conference in July.

b. Texas

Director Wyvill shared that Ms. Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist has requested to travel to the National Consortium in Texas for Deaf Educators.

Board Member Mr. Norman Weverka made the motion to accept the Executive Directors Report as presented, which includes approval for out of state travel. Board Member Dr. Stacie Ray seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Feit, Dr. Ray, Mr. Scherling, Ms. Schutt, Ms. Shaw and Mr. Weverka voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw was absent.

I. Public Comment

Skipped to K.a. Interpreter Issues Committee Report

Ms. Barbara Woodhead, Certified Sign Language Interpreter, Assistant Director for Disability Services at University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL), and Assistant Director for Disability Services at UNL – Ms.

Woodhead started off with discussing the accreditation at the University level for various programs, and the complications involved. Urging NCDHH to get behind the only Interpreter Training Program (ITP) in the state, and help the program get additional funding and staffing as need for the program to succeed. Ms. Woodhead also added that the additional training opportunities being discussed needs to happen to assist in bridging the gap.

Ms. Woodhead shared regarding provisional licensure that you can't do this without an assessment of the skill of the sign language interpreter. Discussion on what some other states are using to gage the skill of the sign language interpreter, stressing that these assessments are not interpreter assessments, they are sign language assessments. Also touched base on the need for a timeline, and the necessity for having supervision.

Board Member, Mr. Norman Weverka shared with the group about the testing of the sign language interpreters in the past.

Ms. Woodhead shared that many sign language interpreters have paid to take the national test several times. Discussion on the scoring system and what that means for needing additional training / experience.

Ms. Woodhead also touched base on the SOP being posted on the NCDHH website. Her concern is who is doing that initial evaluation of the complaint, giving reference to how Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) handles their complaints. Suggesting that the responsible party for handling the initial complaint should be a representative of the Deaf community from the Interpreter Review Board (IRB) and one of the interpreters from the IRB. Ms. Woodhead added that she does not feel it is appropriate to have the Executive Director of NCDHH be the one to make this decision. It was determined and recommended that any complaint that comes into the system should be evaluated for merit.

Ms. Crystal Pierce, community Sign Language Interpreter and a member of Nebraska Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (neRID) – Ms. Pierce addressed the SOP and the concern about who it is that is evaluating the complaint filed for validity. Adding that there has been a lot of concerns in the recent years about repercussions and concerns about the process. Ms. Pierce added that in the past individuals didn't feel like they had the right individuals in this position.

Chairperson Jeremy Fitzpatrick added that the complaint process now has the name of the interpreter redacted completely so that the board members do not know who they are reviewing. NCDHH now has a former investigator with the State Patrol who has guided the process. Chairperson Fitzpatrick asked that Ms. Pierce take back to the community of interpreters the changes that are taking place in handling the complaints. Chairperson Fitzpatrick added that it is critically important to the board that we are regarded as fair and impartial.

Chairperson Fitzpatrick asked the members of the audience if they had anything to present. He added that he hoped all would share the Commission was welcoming, and heard what you had to say. He thanked all for coming.

Mr. Dillard Delts, previous NCDHH Board Member – Mr. Delts shared that this is a year of the presidential election. The other topic that Mr. Delts wanted to share is regarding the Census, asking the board to be active in making sure that all deaf and hard of hearing citizens in Nebraska understand the importance of filling out this information.

Discussion on what is involved in filling out the Census requests that are given to each citizen.

Mr. Cody McEvoy, Advocacy Specialist will be doing a VLOG on the Census topic.

J. Old Business

No old business to report

K. New Business

a. Interpreter Issues Committee Report

Chairperson Jeremy Fitzpatrick shared that the Interpreter Issues Committee (IIC) is made up of Ms. Frances Beurivage, Ms. Candice Arteaga and himself. They have met on a regular basis discussing the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), and provisional licensing.

Board Member Ms. Arteaga gave the following summary of the previous IIC meeting.

- The meeting agenda items included looking into provisional licensure and how to bridge the gap between interpreters graduating from training programs and becoming certified. This could be with UNO doing the provisional license recommendation and for this to include a mentoring program that would include a deaf role model. The concerns for this is if there would be funding for the program. NCDHH could look at developing a deaf mentoring program in collaboration with the students.

- The IIC also discussed QAST and the possibility of allowing UNO to borrow the tapes that could help UNO provide feedback of the interpreting skills of the students.
- Discussed Provisional Licensure, the possibility of an emergency rule and what these would look like, and making sure that there isn't too much flexibility with this. Also discussed establishing guidelines for provisional licensure and having stakeholders who would be involved in establishing guidelines.
- Discussed the demographics of the interpreters, the average age of current interpreters.
- Discussed provisional licensing and comparing that to other states to see what they have, such as South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa.

Director Wyvill shared that we've been asked to develop a document that can be shared on our public website that outlines the SOP for conducting licensure complaints; making sure that what we have is a transparent, open process to either the person complaining or the subject of the complaint. This document would also include who has what job duties relating to complaints, what the Interpreter Review Board (IRB) is responsible for, and what is the Full Board is supposed to handle. Director Wyvill added that once the board approves this SOP, it becomes a living and breathing document. The one issue that needs to be addressed is how does the board address complaints that are deemed frivolous? What is going to be done so that this frivolous complaint is not pending for several months without merit? Who is going to be the one to dismiss this complaint? The second issue is can it be the IRB Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, or should it be the Executive Director that has the ability to dismiss the complaint that has no merit? If the complaint ends up being dismissed, the person who filed the complaint does have the ability to appeal to the full board.

Chairperson Fitzpatrick stated that the provisional licensing topic has been discussed here and at previous board meetings. The Board Members need to know how this is working in other states that have provisional licensing so this will require further investigation by NCDHH staff. Chairperson Fitzpatrick added that he has talked with individuals who are dead set against provisional licenses. Asked if NCDHH can assist in providing training to the incoming sign language interpreters to make it easier for them to pass the certification the first go around.

Chairperson Fitzpatrick added that we as a Board are not at a place to make a decision regarding provisional licensing. Board Member Beaurivage added that the board needs additional information in order to make a good decision that is going to serve the constituents of interpreting services and in addition, the deaf community needs to weigh in on this topic.

Director Wyvill shared that NCDHH will get costs together on what it would take to develop a mentoring program which includes potential payments to interpreters or students and deaf role models, for this to be presented at the June board meeting. Chairperson Fitzpatrick also asked for input from NCDHH on ways that we can make a mentoring program work.

Moved back to I. Public Comment

L. **Adjourn**

Board Member Mr. Norman Weverka moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:12 pm. Board Member Dr. Stacie Ray seconded. With no further discussion, the motion carried with Mr. Fitzpatrick, Ms. Arteaga, Ms. Beurivage, Mr. Robert Feit, Dr. Stacie Ray, Mr. Jonathan Scherling, Ms. Diane Schutt and Mr. Norman Weverka voting aye. Ms. Sandra Shaw was absent

Next meeting is:

- June 12, 2020 from 8:30a – 1:30p
Best Western Plus
224 2nd Ave S
Kearney NE

Attachment 1

Interpreter Training Program Student, Ms. Harley Augensen presented this to the board on behalf of all the students in attendance.

The students before you today share a common goal with the Board: "...access to effective and accessible communication through various mediums" (NCDHH, n.d.). Members of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community have a right to this accessibility. It is well known there is already a local shortage of interpreters in community settings; this will worsen as interpreters retire in the years to come.

The now-defunct QAST represented a bridge over the nationally-recognized gap between graduation to certification for community interpreting. Research shows "On average, it takes BA/BS degree students 19 to 24 months post-graduation to achieve national certification" (Godfrey, L., 2011). NCDHH recognized this gap, using the QAST to "provide meaningful feedback and recommendations for interpreters". The loss of this bridge means that students who wish to remain in Nebraska and serve in community settings face a daunting hurdle in their goal to achieve national certification. Some students in the interpreting training program have disenrolled due to lack of opportunities upon graduation. Decreased program enrollment could shut down the only interpreter training program in Nebraska, worsening the interpreter shortage the community is facing in a multitude of settings.

Three students, the first in a cohort of fourteen, will graduate from UNO in May. This will not be the only cohort affected if the situation is not addressed. Current and future graduates will have to find alternate pathways to achieve their goals of becoming licensed interpreters. Mentors, colleagues, and friends in the DHH community recognize the loss of previously established pathways to certification and have advised students to seek licensure in other states; in particular, Iowa.

Iowa currently offers provisional licensure for novice sign language interpreters that remains valid for up to 4 years. However, the students would recommend setting

stronger provisions for such a license here in Nebraska. Such provisions could include a Bachelor's degree with a concentration in Sign Language Interpreting or Deaf Education, passing the written NIC exam, maintaining CEUs, and working in limited settings. Working within limited settings and/or providing leveled licensing both supports consumer choice within the DHH community and limits the risk for all parties involved. Offering provisional licensure allows NCDHH to set requirements for those individuals navigating the graduation-to-certification gap in order to ensure competency and ethical foundations.

We, as students, are seeking action from the Board in order to maintain quality access for Nebraska's Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community in the future. Our goals are the same; to serve the DHH community by providing qualified interpreting services. We want to work together in this process, recognizing that it is essential to provide qualified interpreters while stressing the reality that a response to this issue needs to be made promptly. We thank you for your consideration and we look forward to seeing the changes the board will make.

Sincerely,

Students of the Interpreter Training Program and Deaf Education Program at University of Nebraska at Omaha

References

- *Godfrey, L. (2011). Characteristics of effective interpreter education programs in the United States. International Journal of Interpreter Education, 3(88-105). Conference of Interpreter Trainers.*
 - *Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/about-ncdhh>*
 - *Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/content/what-gast>*
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Attachment 2

Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program Petition

In an effort to improve telecommunication services to Nebraskans who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind and Speech Impaired, request is being made for the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) to review the specialized telecommunications equipment program's regulations and seek Legislative changes pertaining to eligible standards and criteria to the following:

1. Change the current standards that states only "one person per household" may be a recipient of the telecommunications equipment. Revise this to state "two persons per household" may be recipients. Family members in the household may have challenges with accessing telecommunication services when there is only one cell phone to share, especially when the recipient may be out of the home with the cell phone.
2. Change the current standard giving the recipient the ability to apply for a wireless device, such as a cell phone, to every three (3) years instead of five (5) years, leaving other specialized telephone options and telephone signaler equipment at five (5) years. This change is necessary due to ongoing rapid evolution in cell phone technology. And cell phone users who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind or Speech Impaired may need to stay current with the technology and telecommunication relay service programs or apps to assist in their daily communication needs.

This petition shall serve as documentation from members of the community who are either Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind or Speech Impaired requesting NCDHH to make this a high priority bill for next year's Legislation to implement these revisions.