**MCDHH Statewide Advisory Council Meeting Agenda**

**Zoom - Remote**

**January 16, 2025**

**5:30 – 7:30 PM**

**SAC Members present:**

**Michelle Motta Dardeno (MMD)**

**Dottie Griffith (DG)**

**Brock Cordeiro (BC)**

**Jessica Rich (JR)**

**Zinma Camelio (ZC)**

**Michelle Dunn (MD)**

**Attendees from the community:**

**Anthony Russo (AR)**

**Suzann B**edrosian **(SB)**

**Sue Philip (SP)**

**MCDHH Staff:**

**Heather Daley (HD)**

**Sharon Harrison (SH)**

**Anthony Harrison (AH)**

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| **Agenda Topic** | **Discussion** | **Action Item** |
| Welcome | Established Quorum  Communication Protocols  Review of Agenda |  |
| Review of Minutes from December 19, 2024 | MMD presented the minutes from the December 19, 2024, meeting for approval.  DG moved to approve the December minutes as presented. BC seconded the motion.  SAC members signaled their approval with a show of thumbs-up. No objections were recorded.  December 19, 2024 Meeting minutes accepted into the record. |  |
| **Chairperson’s Report** | No Chairperson’s report was presented. |  |
| **Legislative Task Force Report -**Tracking Bills for 2025 - 2026 | BC provided a brief legislative update, noting that the filing deadline for new legislation was the following day at 5:00 PM. While the new legislative session began on January 1st, bills have been gradually filed since then. He estimated the number of bills could exceed 6,000, though this remains subject to change. Legislators were actively filing and re-filing bills, with more expected in the coming days.  Although the legislature has convened, BC explained that bills could still be filed after the deadline, but the process would become more complex. While bills can technically be filed at any time, those submitted later require additional steps to be considered. He added that committees had not yet been re-established, so updates on key committee chairpersons, such as those for Public Health or Ways and Means, were unavailable. While there was significant activity in the House, committee structures were still being organized, and chairs for critical committees like Public Health and Education had yet to be confirmed.  MMD asked if any key bills were unlikely to be re-filed and of particular interest to the SAC. BC responded that, based on what he had heard, nearly all bills from the previous session had expired. He noted that a more substantive update would be possible once new bills were officially filed, and committees were re-established.  MMD proposed that once committee chair assignments were finalized, the SAC should review and familiarize themselves with those overseeing key committees. She suggested adding this as an agenda item for the next meeting to support strategic planning. BC agreed and offered to present a list of key committees and their chairs.  SB inquired about how the community could stay informed on priority bills and advocate collectively. BC explained that all legislative information is publicly available on the Massachusetts legislature’s website but acknowledged that navigating it can be time-consuming. He suggested the SAC streamline the process by summarizing key committee chairs and relevant legislative updates at the next meeting. Also, he offered to compile a spreadsheet of relevant bills and committee assignments, as he has done in past sessions, to facilitate this effort.  BC confirmed he would prepare a list of key committees, chairs, and initial insights into priority bills for discussion at the March meeting.  MMD recommended using the March meeting to identify critical legislation and develop advocacy strategies, aligning this discussion with the agenda item on Constituents’ Day. BC noted that legislative activity typically increases in the spring and summer, with major bills likely advancing later in the session.  MMD asked HD to include these topics as agenda items for the SAC’s February and March meetings. She also encouraged members to reach out to BC with questions or concerns before the next meeting.  With no further questions or discussion, MMD transitioned to the Commissioner’s report and invited SH to provide updates on the Commissioner’s behalf. | BC will prepare a report on key committee chair assignments and initial legislative priorities for the February/March meetings.  SAC members will review and prioritize key bills for the community at the February/March meetings. |
| **Commissioner’s Report** | The Commissioner’s report was presented by SH. SH provided updates regarding ongoing and upcoming initiatives at the MCDHH. (PowerPoint attached).  SH introduced the new MCDHH website and requested SAC members to explore and provide feedback. HD shared the screen and walked through the website, highlighting where SAC information is located. MMD noted that the discussion about listing SAC members’ names or bios remains unresolved and requested clarification on whether a decision has been made.  SH acknowledged that the website is currently English-heavy and emphasized MCDHH’s commitment to making ASL and English equally accessible. SH also explained that adding ASL translations requires extensive IT work, community feedback, and content creation. SAC members were encouraged to provide input on improving accessibility.  **Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Funding**  MD inquired about the reduction of SUD funding from one year to six months and whether MCDHH was aware of the cut in advance. SH confirmed that the cut was unexpected for MCDHH and that they are working with BSAS (Bureau of Substance Abuse Services) to address concerns. She noted that BSAS is reviewing provided information, and MCDHH is hopeful for a favorable outcome.  **CATTS**  MD raised concerns about representation within the CATTS Department and the language used in trainings. She emphasized the impact of Deaf trainers using ASL when educating law enforcement and other professionals. SH responded that the department currently has 1.5 full-time equivalent staff members and acknowledged the importance of having a diverse team.  **Forums for Feedback**  SP expressed concerns regarding the lack of Deaf community outreach for the Forums for Feedback held on January 6th and 8th. She noted that while interpreters were informed, the Deaf community did not receive adequate communication on how to participate. SH responded that a "Save the Date" notice was sent in advance.  SP raised concerns about potential federal policy changes that could negatively impact the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, including possible ADA modifications and immigration policies affecting Deaf immigrants. She urged MCDHH to be proactive rather than reactive. SH reassured members that MCDHH is monitoring the situation and has confidence in state leadership to support the community.  **Listening Sessions Follow-Up**  SP requested an update on the outcomes of the statewide Listening Sessions. SH explained that MCDHH categorized and prioritized feedback, referring relevant issues to sister agencies where appropriate. SP emphasized the importance of keeping the community informed about follow-up actions.  MMD proposed formally requesting that the Commissioner provide an executive summary of the Listening Sessions’ outcomes and next steps in his next report. SP recalled that an initial summary was provided in the summer but noted that further details on prioritization and implementation would be beneficial. The SAC agreed to include this request in the meeting minutes.  **Deaf Senior Services**  SP inquired about MCDHH’s collaboration with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs on services for Deaf seniors. SH deferred this discussion to the next meeting when the Commissioner is present, as he has been leading this initiative. HD was asked to note this for follow-up. | **Website Feedback:** SAC members to review the new MCDHH website and provide feedback on accessibility and content.  **SAC Member Listings:** Clarification requested on whether SAC member names or bios will be added to the website.  **Listening Sessions Update:** Formal request for the Commissioner to provide an executive summary of Listening Sessions in the next report.  **Deaf Senior Services:** Commissioner to provide an update at the next meeting. |
| **SAC Members** | **Community Engagement with SAC - Probing Questions**  ***(****How can we engage the community more effectively with SAC? What are the roadblocks to greater engagement? What is the "word on the street" about MCDHH and/or SAC?)*  MMD revisited the previous month’s discussion on engaging current SAC members, expanding SAC membership, and ensuring effective community involvement.  She highlighted three (3) key issues raised in the last meeting:   1. A lack of follow-through on community engagement after interactions with the Commission. 2. Limited awareness of the SAC’s role within the Deaf community in Massachusetts. 3. A suggestion to conduct an anonymous survey of past SAC members to gather insights into their experiences and reasons for leaving.   BC confirmed the summary was accurate.  MMD invited SAC members to share their feedback, suggesting a shift from discussion to action. She noted that one of her goals for the year was to have an in-person meeting for SAC members to foster better relationships and team building, but logistical challenges had made this difficult. She also expressed frustration at the lack of sustained engagement from community members and asked for thoughts on how to address this issue.  ZC recommended conducting a survey to understand the decline in engagement and how SAC could better serve the community. She suggested gathering feedback from both past and current SAC members.  MMD agreed and shared that while SAC meetings were well-attended in the past, there had been a decline in recent years, largely due to internal challenges within the Commission.  DG shared her experience of the lengthy SAC appointment process as a signing Deaf person and suggested increasing SAC’s visibility within the community. DG proposed collaborating with MSAD (Massachusetts Association of the Deaf) to distribute surveys and reach a broader audience. DG also emphasized the importance of providing surveys in both English and ASL for accessibility.  MMD asked for clarification on how SAC could effectively connect with MSAD, noting the complexity of the vetting process for new members. DG proposed that SAC members might attend MSAD's meeting to share information about SAC and encourage others to consider joining.  JR agreed with DG's point and added that she had never heard of the SAC until a friend mentioned it. She suggested that the SAC should aim for a mid-sized group, as larger groups can become difficult to manage.  MMD clarified that when revisiting the SAC bylaws, the membership cap had been set at 20 members, though this number had never been reached. She mentioned that in the past, SAC had a well-rounded representation, including interpreters, Teachers of the Deaf, and members of the DeafBlind community. However, the current group’s composition has shifted.  MD asked about the current representation on the SAC and stressed the importance of including diverse groups such as the late-deafened and hard-of-hearing communities.  MD suggested that there may be misconceptions about MCDHH’s services, with some community members believing it primarily serves the signing Deaf population. MD proposed that clarifying the services MCDHH provides to various subgroups within the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community could improve outreach.  DG added that the Interpreter Referral Service’s high turnover creates confusion, and it would be helpful to have clearer visual communication (e.g., names, pictures, and contact information for the appropriate regional contacts).  **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Constituents' Annual Day**  Moving on to the next agenda item, MMD initiated the discussion regarding the upcoming Deaf and Hard of Hearing Constituents' Annual Day. She noted that while SAC had not organized the event last year, it had been successfully held in previous years. The event, traditionally held at the Massachusetts State House, brings together the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, legislators, and other stakeholders to highlight key issues, recognize achievements, and facilitate legislative advocacy.  The discussion continued with a focus on the format of the event. JR requested clarification on the history and purpose of the event, to which MMD provided an overview. MMD explained that the event typically includes invited speakers, participation from legislators, award presentations, and information tables from various organizations. Pre-COVID, the event was a well-attended annual tradition, but in recent years it had been scaled down.  ZC suggested using new outreach methods, like panel discussions and interactive elements, to boost engagement.  SP recommended preparing a one-page document outlining key legislative priorities, similar to previous years, to support community members in their advocacy efforts. SP also emphasized the need for ASL-accessible materials to ensure inclusivity, especially for DeafBlind individuals.  SB highlighted that 2025 marks the 40th anniversary of MCDHH and proposed aligning the event with this milestone. SB suggested spotlighting the agency’s new accessible website as a major achievement. SB also noted the historical role of the event in supporting key legislative initiatives, such as the rights of deaf and hard-of-hearing children to language access, and emphasized the need for improved communication channels, similar to the former Deaf Community News.  MMD called for a decision from SAC members regarding whether to proceed with planning the event. A vote was conducted, and the motion to move forward with the event passed unanimously. | Heather will contact Carl to request a date and location at the State House for late spring/early summer.  SAC members will collaborate on structuring the event’s program and discussing key advocacy points.  Efforts will be made to ensure accessibility through ASL-friendly and DeafBlind-friendly information-sharing methods. |
| **SAC Announcements, Next Meeting** | MMD entertained a motion to adjourn. With no objections, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent.  **Announcements** The next SAC meeting will be held on **Thursday, February 20, 2025** at **5:30 PM.**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | ~~1~~ | ~~September 19, 2024~~ | | ~~2~~ | ~~October 17, 2024~~ | | ~~3~~ | ~~November 14, 2024~~ | | ~~4~~ | ~~December 19, 2024~~ | | 5 | ~~January 16, 2025~~ | | 6 | February 20, 2025 | | 7 | March 20, 2025 | | 8 | April 17, 2025 | | 9 | May 15, 2025 | | 10 | June 12, 2025 | |  |