**MCDHH Statewide Advisory Council Meeting Agenda**

**Zoom - Remote**

**February 20, 2025**

**5:30 – 7:30 PM**

**SAC Members present:**

**Michelle Motta Dardeno (MMD)**

**Ellen Perkins (EP)**

**Dottie Griffith (DG)**

**Brock Cordeiro (BC)**

**Jonathan Ozek (JO)**

**Attendees from the community:**

**Lee Nettles (LN)**

**Shannon Pollock (SP)**

**Sue Philip (SP)**

**Mee Eng (ME)**

**MCDHH Staff:**

**Commissioner Opeoluwa Sotonwa (OS)**

**Heather Daley (HD)**

**Sharon Harrison (SH)**

**Sehin Mekuria (SM)**

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| **Agenda Topic** | **Discussion** | **Action Item** |
| **Welcome** | Established Quorum |  |
| **Review of Minutes from January 16, 2025** | MMD presented the minutes from the January 16, 2025 meeting for approval. HD informed that there was a clarification request from Linda Sakin regarding one section of the minutes related to BSAS (Bureau of Substance Addiction Services) to MCDHH. This section had been updated and will be included in a revised set of minutes. MMD noted that since the version reviewed by the members was incomplete, the acceptance of the minutes would be postponed until the next meeting. The SAC will review and approve both the January 16, 2025, and the February 20, 2025 minutes at that time. | The SAC members will review and approve two sets of meeting minutes (January 16, 2025, and February 20, 2025) at the next meeting. |
| **Chairperson’s Report** | MMD shared that her report would be tied to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Constituents’ Annual Day discussion, as it was a key agenda item.  |  |
| **Legislative Task Force Report -**Tracking Bills for 2025 - 2026 | BC provided an update on the legislative process and the bills filed during this session, highlighting key developments since the previous meeting:* Approximately 6,000 bills were filed in the legislature, with 60 identified as relevant to the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community, based on keywords such as "Deaf," "hard of hearing," "ASL," and others.
	+ DG inquired about bills related to Video Relay Services (VRS) interpreters, but BC clarified that no specific bills focused on that issue. The closest references appeared in four bills related to video interpreters, one concerning language access, and another related to telehealth and digital equity for patients.
* BC emphasized that while the deadline for filing new bills had passed, bills could still be introduced with additional steps. The focus now should be on securing cosponsors for the bills already filed.
* BC explained that the next step for the legislature was to assign bills to various standing committees, after which public hearings would take place to accept written and oral testimony.

**Discussion:**DG raised concerns about the lack of focus on interpreter equity for the Deaf community, particularly with some hospitals changing their policies regarding interpreter access. She highlighted the need for better communication equity, especially in light of challenges with Video Relay Interpreters (VRI) in medical settings.BC suggested that the best course of action would be to work with organizations such as the Massachusetts State Association for the Deaf (MSAD) or Deaf, Inc. to draft a bill addressing interpreter equity. He explained that the legislative process would involve identifying a legislator to introduce the bill and following the necessary steps.OS added that the MCDHH is unable to regulate private hospitals, but it does have policies to help match Deaf individuals with preferred interpreters. He recommended that SAC members contact the Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) to voice their concerns and assist in drafting the necessary bills.JO thanked BC for his work and expressed excitement about collaborating to accomplish goals for the community. He also mentioned he was in the process of educating himself about the legislative process and would reach out with any questions.ME, a new community member, inquired about using a visual representation, such as a spreadsheet or slides, to help members better understand the bills under consideration. She recommended sharing the spreadsheet during meetings for easier access and discussion.BC clarified that he maintains a spreadsheet of the 60 relevant bills and that it had been distributed to SAC members. He confirmed he would send the spreadsheet to ME and others who are interested. MMD acknowledged that while the spreadsheet is distributed to SAC members in advance, the committee will work on providing clearer visuals during future meetings. |  |

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| **Commissioner’s Report** | MCDHH Updates from Commissioner, *PowerPoint attached.***HD. 4071** OS shared an update regarding HD.4071, the American Sign Language Inclusion Act. He noted that the Governor expressed strong support for the bill in her recent State of the Commonwealth Address, advocating for the inclusion of American Sign Language (ASL) in public schools as a recognized foreign language credit. The bill had gained momentum; however, the original sponsor, Carol Doherty, recently passed away, which required immediate action to ensure its continuation.BC recommended that SAC members reach out to any of the sixteen co-sponsors to identify a new lead sponsor to keep the bill active in the current legislative session.MMD inquired whether it would be permissible for SAC to draft and disseminate a template letter encouraging co-sponsors to take the lead on the bill.OS confirmed that such an action was allowable under the Open Meeting Law, provided it was documented as an official action within the meeting minutes. He suggested that SAC authorize MCDHH staff to manage the clerical aspects of distributing the letter on behalf of the SAC.SP asked for clarification on the ASL Bill for high school students, recalling that a similar bill was passed in the 1990s, which allowed ASL to be offered as an elective. She questioned whether the new bill would strengthen the existing law and if it was necessary to revisit the old legislation.OS explained that the current statute allows ASL as an elective, while the new bill seeks to strengthen the language, ensuring that ASL satisfies a world language requirement.MMD proposed creating a short, standardized template letter for SAC members and community members to send to legislators to request support for the HD.4071 bill. She asked for input from council members and a volunteer to draft the letter.* **Motion:** BC moved to authorize the drafting of the letter.
* **Seconded by:** Jonathan Ozek
* **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

BC volunteered to draft the letter, which will be reviewed by MMD and distributed by HD with the meeting minutes.**Website Design Considerations**JO shared his experience with the Hearing Loss Association of America and mentioned the addition of an accessibility logo on their website, which helps individuals with hearing and vision disabilities navigate the site.OS thanked JO for his input and emphasized that they were actively working to enhance accessibility standards for the state.ME raised concerns regarding accessibility for individuals who are color-blind. She suggested using simpler design elements, such as black and white color schemes, and ensuring text is legible on mobile devices. She emphasized the importance of keeping design simple and accessible for all people with disabilities.OS thanked ME for her input and reiterated the importance of the ongoing efforts to ensure MCDHH's website is accessible to all individuals. | **ACTION ITEM:*** BC to draft a template letter for legislative support of the HD.4071 bill.
* MMD to review and finalize the letter.
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| **SAC Members**  | **Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Constituents' Annual Day**MMD opened the discussion on planning the DHH Constituents’ Annual Day and provided an update that all spring dates had already been booked, preventing the event from taking place this season. As a result, the SAC considered moving the event to September, which coincides with Deaf Awareness Week, offering a strategic opportunity for engagement and visibility.**Discussion:*** EP supported the idea of holding DHH Constituents' Day in September, citing the weather-related challenges of holding it earlier in the year and the likelihood of avoiding snow.
* DG expressed support for the September timing, with a preference for the third week of the month.
* BC expressed preference for an earlier date but agreed that September is suitable and aligns with legislative focus after the budget cycle.
* JO agreed that September is a great time, coinciding with Deaf Awareness Month, and expressed excitement about the event.

HD clarified the scheduling process, stating that the calendar for State House events will open on April 1st for September and onwards. The SAC will need to submit multiple date preferences, after which available dates will be confirmed.MMD raised concerns about preparation time, given that SAC’s first regular meeting after summer recess is typically in September. She suggested the possibility of holding an additional planning meeting in late August to ensure adequate preparation.EP noted that in past years, much of the preparation was focused on setting up exhibit tables, which were removed post-COVID, significantly reducing prep work.OS suggested that it might be valuable to collaborate with other organizations, such as MSAD, HLAA, and DEAF, Inc., and bring back the awards to the event. MMD confirmed that awards could potentially be reinstated, though support from the Commission would be needed, particularly regarding the organization and selection of awards.JO volunteered to reach out to other organizations such as HLAA, ALDA, and YMCA to invite them to participate in the September event. He also suggested that vendors like CapTel might be interested in joining the event as well. | **ACTION ITEMS:*** Confirm September Date for DHH Constituents’ Annual Day.
* SAC members are advised to prepare for a possible late-August or early-September meeting to discuss the event logistics, given the shortened preparation timeline. Legislative cheat sheets and other materials will need to be prepared over the summer.
* JO volunteered to connect with other organizations like HLAA and DEAF, Inc., potentially inviting them to join the September event.
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| **SAC Announcements, Next Meeting**  | **Announcements**JO shared information about the upcoming Hearing Loss of New England Conference, taking place in Marlborough, Massachusetts, from March 28th to March 30th, 2025. Jonathan also mentioned that the MCDHH is part of the event and invited SAC members to attend and collaborate. He will send further details to HD, who will share them with the group.The next SAC meeting will be held on **Thursday, March 20, 2025** at **5:30 PM.**

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| ~~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 |

MMD entertained a motion to adjourn. With no objections, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent. |  |