**MCDHH Statewide Advisory Council Meeting Agenda**

**Zoom - Remote**

**November 21, 2024**

**5:30 – 7:30 PM**

**SAC Members present:**

**Michelle Motto Dardeno (MMD)**

**Dottie Griffith (DG)**

**Michelle Dunn (MD)**

**Brock Cordeiro (BC)**

**Ellen Perkins (EP)**

**Jessica Rich (JR)**

**Zinma Camelio (ZC)**

**Jonathan LeJeune (JL)**

**Linda Sakin (LS)**

**Special Guest: Commissioner Toni Wolf (TW), *MassAbility***

**MCDHH Staff:**

**Commissioner Opeoluwa Sotonwa (OS)**

**Heather Daley (HD)**

**Sharon Harrison (SH)**

**Sehin Mekuria (SM)**

**April Smith (AS)**

**Holly Pearson (HP)**

**Peggy Lee (PL)**

**Janay Mitchell (JM)**

**Cindy Walker (CW)**

**Attendees from the community:**

**Lee Nettles (LN)**

**Anthony Russo (AR)**

**Jonathan Ozek (JO)**

**Mee Eng (ME)**

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

Usherla Berry (UB)

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| **Agenda Topic** | **Discussion** | **Action Item** |
| Welcome | Established Quorum  Communication Protocols  Introductions  Review of Agenda |  |
| Review of Minutes from June 27, 2024 and September 19, 2024 | MMD presented the minutes from the June 27, 2024, and September 19, 2024, meetings for approval.  EP moved to accept the June and September minutes as presented. BC seconded the motion.  SAC members indicated their approval through a show of thumbs-up. No objections were noted.  The minutes from June and September were unanimously approved and entered into the record. |  |
| **Guest Speaker – *Commissioner Toni Wolf from MassAbility*** | MMD introduced Commissioner Toni Wolf (TW) of *MassAbility*, highlighting her extensive career in nonprofit leadership and her significant contributions since becoming Commissioner in 2017. TW provided an overview of the recent legislative renaming of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) to MassAbility. She discussed the evolution of the agency’s identity and services over the last four years, emphasizing the need for inclusivity and contemporary representation in its branding and language.  **Key Points of the Presentation**:   * The rebranding and focus on strength, capability, and inclusion, reflected in the agency’s new name and mission. * **Consultative Process**: The renaming involved focus groups, including young adults and disability advocates, concluding in the selection of "*MassAbility*" to emphasize empowerment and abilities rather than limitations. * **Program Updates**: MassAbility provides a spectrum of services under *Career Services*, *Home and Community Life*, and *Social Security Disability Determinations*.   + MassAbility’s efforts to improve customer service through a streamlined approach to service access via "*MassAbility Connect*," centralizing services under one portal. * The agency's efforts to modernize language and terminology, moving away from terms like "*rehabilitation*" and "*vocational rehabilitation*" in favor of "*career services*" and "*career counselors*." * **Visual Rebranding**: The agency's branding, including its new logo and color scheme, was designed to reflect creativity, sensitivity, and inclusivity, with colors like purple and turquoise symbolizing compassion and clarity.   **Discussion and Q&A:** After Commissioner Wolf’s presentation, MMD opened the floor for questions from SAC members.  OS praised the MassAbility rebranding efforts, especially the inclusivity and empowerment conveyed through the new name.  LS inquired about services for individuals over 60 and received clarification that home care services are provided for individuals up to 60, while other services have no age limit.  ZC shared her personal experience as a caretaker for her father in the ABI Waiver program and her child with a hearing impairment. She expressed her appreciation for the information provided and mentioned how hearing the presentation helped alleviate some of her concerns.  MMD read comments from the Zoom chat box, including one from JO who shared his positive experience with the MassAbility Explore Possibilities program and his interest in future events.  LS raised a comment regarding collaboration with rehabilitation services, specifically mentioning *Spaulding Rehab* and *Whittier,* both of which provide excellent care to individuals who might benefit from being connected with MassAbility services. TW acknowledged the importance of these partnerships and confirmed that MassAbility has strong relationships with Spaulding and Whittier.  ME asked if Deaf people with mental health conditions could access *MassAbility* services for career and educational support. TW confirmed that MassAbility has specialized counselors who serve the Deaf community as well as those with mental health conditions. The counselors often collaborate to provide integrated support for individuals, and she encouraged ME to reach out for more information.  LN raised a concern regarding individuals over 60 who require services from both *MassAbility* and Elder Affairs, particularly those in the Deaf and disability communities.LN also expressed concern about the lack of understanding within Elder Affairs of the specific needs of these communities and the importance of increased collaboration.  TW clarified that *MassAbility* primarily collaborates with Elder Affairs regarding home care services once an individual turns 60. However, *MassAbility* continues to serve individuals of all ages for other services, and there is ongoing collaboration between the two agencies, particularly in cases where Deaf individuals or those with disabilities require support. |  |
| **Chairperson’s Report** | MMD began by making a change to the agenda, inviting LS to share updates.  LS reported that ALDA (Association of Late-Deafened Adults) has expanded with a new chapter in the Merrimack Valley, which will serve residents in that area and Southern New Hampshire. The chapter kicked off with a captioned movie event. LS also announced the return of the annual holiday brunch for paid-up members on January 5, 2025, at the Westford Regency and Conference Center. Additionally, LS shared information about a New England Regional event called "*Living Well with Hearing Loss*," scheduled for March 30, 2025, in Marlborough, sponsored by the HLAA (Hearing Loss Association of America). | **ACTION:** HD will share the details of the ALDA and HLAA events with SAC members. |
| **Legislative Task Force Report -**Tracking Bills for 2023 - 2024 | BC provided an update on the status of legislative activity, noting that while activity had slowed in recent months, significant action would resume in January when new legislation is filed. BC also emphasized the need for the SAC to prioritize legislation for the upcoming session.  The report included:   * Tracking of approximately 70 bills related to disability rights and services. * A reminder that bills must be re-filed for the new legislative session starting in January 2025. * A discussion on the importance of focusing on a smaller number of bills to effectively advocate for their passage.   DG raised concerns about the use of Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) in medical settings, specifically the technological challenges that hinder effective communication for Deaf patients. She suggested that a bill should be introduced to ensure reliable and accessible communication in healthcare settings. ME echoed DG's concerns, adding that individuals with mental health issues and learning disabilities may also struggle with VRI. She called for increased awareness and more flexible options for communication access in emergency rooms and medical settings.  BC recommended working with legislators to draft and support legislation that addresses these issues. He shared his experience with advocating for legislation in other areas and encouraged the SAC to collaborate with lawmakers and advocacy organizations. |  |
| **Commissioner’s Report** | MCDHH Updates from Commissioner, *PowerPoint attached.*  A specific question was raised by MMD regarding the redesign of the MCDHH website and whether a dedicated space for SAC member bios would be included. OS confirmed that a page for SAC-related information would be added, although the inclusion of personal information and photographs is being reconsidered due to security concerns with AI and data privacy risks. MMD clarified that the bios, which were originally drafted, did not include personal information but instead focused on members' involvement, the communities they represent, and when they joined the SAC. She emphasized that if members prefer not to include any personal information, only their names can be listed. |  |
| **SAC Members** | MMD opened the floor to SAC members for discussion regarding 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?)* She asked members to reflect on how the SAC can engage the community more effectively, identify potential roadblocks to greater engagement, and gather insights about how the SAC and MCDHH are perceived by the community.  MD shared that while she has heard mostly positive feedback from the community, there are some concerns among members of the ASL (American Sign Language) community, especially late-deafened individuals. These members sometimes feel that MCDHH's responses to their concerns do not fully address their needs. MD explained that some issues raised by the community, such as those related to the Department of Public Health or VRI (Video Relay Interpreting), are outside the scope of MCDHH's services and need to be referred to other agencies.  She emphasized the need for clearer communication with the community, particularly regarding the outcomes of Listening Sessions. MD noted that when issues are raised that fall outside MCDHH's responsibility, it is important for SAC members to act as liaisons to ensure the community’s concerns are passed on to the appropriate entities.  OS acknowledged Michelle’s comments and clarified the SAC's role in advocacy and community liaison. He encouraged SAC members to use their position to advocate on behalf of the community and to reach out to legislators, when necessary, as this advocacy carries weight due to their official appointment by the Governor. He also discussed the importance of the Listening Sessions, noting that while some concerns may fall outside of MCDHH's scope, they are shared with other relevant agencies, and collaborations with other departments are ongoing.  MD expressed her desire to ensure that she effectively serves as a liaison between the community and the MCDHH. She raised the question of how to balance the role of being an advocate for the community, while also respecting the boundaries of what MCDHH can do. OS affirmed that advocacy is essential, especially in regard to budget issues and resource allocation. He thanked the SAC members for their continued advocacy efforts and encouraged them to be vocal in their support for MCDHH.  **Next Steps for Community Engagement**: MMD encouraged SAC members to reflect on the questions raised about community engagement and to continue working on ways to bridge communication between MCDHH and the communities they serve. She announced that these discussions would continue at the next meeting, scheduled for December 19, 2024.  **Security Notice**: MMD informed the group that due to disruptions during the meeting, an additional layer of security would be added for future meetings. This will include requiring advanced registration to receive the meeting link in order to prevent unauthorized participants from accessing the meeting.  MMD thanked all attendees, including the interpreters and CART providers, for their contributions. She also expressed gratitude for the work of SAC members and MCDHH staff. The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 PM. | **ACTION:** HD will send a new Zoom registration link to SAC members. |
| **SAC Announcements, Next Meeting** | |  |  | | --- | --- | | ~~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 | |  |