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Testimony of Steven A. Florio, Commissioner
Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
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Good morning, Vice Chair Friedman, Representative Sean Garballey and Honorable members of the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and respond to questions about the Governor's FY2020 Budget.

I am Steven Florio, new Commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) starting just a few weeks ago February 19, 2019. MCDHH is responsible for improving accessibility and quality of existing services and promoting development of new services when necessary. We provide the Commonwealth with progressive, protective, and innovative resources to serve Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late-deafened people in an extensive range of human service, healthcare, safety, legal, education, and economic settings with accommodations required under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

As a newcomer, I am excited about bringing my 16-year leadership experience from the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as Executive Director. Personally, I am Deaf since birth and fluent in American Sign Language. I have a Bachelor's in Accounting from Gallaudet University and a Master's in Leadership and Non-Profit Management from Northeastern University. I have been advocating on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues for more than 25 years at the local, state, national, and international levels. For most of my career, I had been actively involved with Early Hearing Detection Intervention (EHDI) and Emergency Management, both on the federal and state levels. For the next few months, I am committed to learn more about the programs and services MCDHH has been offering and about their collaborations with state agencies, to engage in the community meetings and interact with constituents in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and to evaluate communication channels

and resources for the quality of information and service delivery. To date, I have already started a series of introductory one-on-one meetings with my staff members.

Our services include educating consumers and private and public entities about programs, services, and opportunities to assist our constituency. With the funding allocated in House 1, MCDHH will continue our mission of providing accessible communication, education and advocacy to consumers and private and public entities so that individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing can access and contribute to programs, services, and opportunities throughout Massachusetts.

MCDHH at a Glance

- According to a study led by Johns Hopkins researchers and published in the November 14, 2011 Archives of Internal Medicine, 20% of the U.S. population (12 years and older) have some degree of hearing challenges at least in one ear; which means approximately 1,300,000 in Massachusetts.
- 58% of MCDHH's constituents are MassHealth eligible and live below the Federal Poverty Level.
- Healthcare access is a significant part of our Interpreter and CART Referral service; a result of more people having insurance coverage, living longer, and becoming better informed about their right to accessible services.
- MCDHH staff serve as language and cultural mediators for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing constituents who are seeking assistance from other state agencies.
- MCDHH represents Deaf and Hard of Hearing subject matter expertise, perspective, and service requirements on more than 55 work groups and advisory councils in both state government and local community initiatives.
- MCDHH has a statewide presence through regional offices in Boston, Springfield, Westborough, Plymouth, and Pittsfield.
- MCDHH has 45.4 FTEs. Among our staff, 31% are Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Late-Deafened.

Fiscal Year 2019 Advancements:

Social Services

MCDHH's Case Management staff of four full-time and one part-time Adult Case Managers and four Children's Specialists recorded 1,935 contacts with clients of all ages who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late-deafened.

Our community Deaf Hard of Hearing Independent Living Services (DHILS) partners provided 16,991 hours of independent living skills to 2,871 consumers from Pittsfield to Provincetown. When one realizes that behind each of these numbers are actual human beings who are being helped with critical life issues, this highlights the impact that our MCDHH and DHILS staff have in our communities.

Communication Access Training & Technology Services (CATTS)

Total of 132 Training/Evaluation/Technical Assistance Events for FY2018:

- 41 State Agency Trainings/Tech Assistance
- 20 Elder Service Agency Training
- 21 Municipal/Local Training/Tech Assistance
- 14 Hospital/Medical Trainings/Tech Assistance
- 8 Law Enforcement/Public Safety/Tech Assistance
- 6 Legal Trainings/Tech Assistance Events
- 22 Non Categorized Events

MCDHH is currently working to develop an ongoing training program for first responders across the Commonwealth. One project under review for FY2019 is a Visor Card. Several states have made these visual tools available to both the Police and Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to foster better communication during a traffic stop or other police interaction. With input from the community and law enforcement agencies we hope to implement this card, instructions for its use and police training for the card in FY2019. We are also exploring other visual tools that may helpful for other first responders in emergency situations.

The Victim Service Program at MCDHH is now in the second year of a two-year, one-million-dollar program to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, elder abuse, youth violence, and other violent crimes. Our program provides vital resources and referrals to survivors by connecting them to trauma informed mental health providers, free legal assistance, emergency housing and other state and community resources. The Victim Service Program has provided a wraparound model of service delivery to 45 survivors statewide. Our Program also provides outreach and education to state agencies and community providers to help build capacity for Deaf and Hard of Hearing victims. We have conducted a survey of 125 victim service providers, visited 40 victim service agencies, 10 Victim witness programs, and held two stakeholders' meetings to increase awareness of the cultural, linguistic, and communication access needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. Victim service funding will continue through the VOCA grant until June 2020 while MCDHH secures new funding to maintain this critical resource in our community.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

MCDHH partners with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to implement regulations for teachers and interpreters who work in K-12 settings. MCDHH administers the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI), a licensure requirement for teachers, and the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) for educational interpreters. MCDHH also participates in the Early Education Task Force which identifies strategies for ensuring early language acquisition for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, birth through age five, and leverages the expertise of the agency's Children Specialists to support the public schools. The Task Force focuses on how Deaf and Hard of Hearing students will participate in the MA State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), which measures the social emotional outcomes for children.

Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment

Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) is the national model for identifying individuals who may be at risk for Substance Use Disorder. MCDHH began the development of an ASL equivalent model almost 10 years ago. The ASL version of the SBIRT is now being piloted by the DHILS program providers. MCDHH also developed an ASL Motivational Interview Technique DVD to assist in the screening process, to assess for at risk behaviors. FY2018 accomplishments include a full ASL script ready for production and distribution to all our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Independent Living Services (DHILS) providers who are beginning to pilot the SBIRT.

Access to Health

MCDHH launched a multi-year project with DPH, MassHealth, UMass Medical, DHILS providers, Massachusetts State Association of the Deaf and interpreters who work in medical settings. This initiative is designed to strengthen access to medical care, educate and empower the community, train and increase provider and interpreter awareness, focus on communication access preferences to reduce disparities in access and care. FY2018 activities included finalizing the consumer training curriculum, outreach to state agencies and providers, developing vlogs and collateral materials to educate consumers and providers. FY2019 activities will focus on consumer training, ongoing development of materials including a communication access checklist for Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients and medical providers, and continued outreach to the community.

Disease Prevention Videos

For FY2019, DPH has provided funding to MCDHH to create vlogs on infectious diseases including HIV testing and prevention, talking with your doctor about care and treatment for Deaf clients who are living with HIV, and other topics as indicated.

We also assist state agencies by providing technical assistance, bilingual social services, and communication access so that state programs and benefits are accessible to adults and children. We assist other state agencies in their work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing families. Our multi-agency partnerships are a major part of how we assist people in accessing services and stabilizing their lives.

Inter-Departmental Service Agreements (ISAs)

Through ISAs with MCDHH, state agencies purchase specific assistance in order to make their programs and services accessible to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. These agreements pay for purchase of direct services, but do not reimburse MCDHH for administration and coordination. MCDHH provides the following state agencies with services:

- DPH/Bureau of Substance Abuse Services: Interpreters and CART for inpatient, outpatient, detox centers, residential treatment, preventive support group.
- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: K12 Sign Language Proficiency Interviews; Educational Interpreter Quality Assurance; Registry, training and mentoring.

- Executive Office of Public Safety/911Commission: Certification for Specialized Equipment Distribution; processing applications for individuals who request specialized equipment in order to access the 911 emergency telecommunications system.
- Bureau of the State House: ASL Interpreting and CART services.
- Mass Commission for Blind: Providing Interpreting for Deaf-Blind and providing substance user disorder training to Deaf-Blind consumers/rehabilitation centers and hospital managers.
- Massachusetts Office of Victim Assistance (MOVA) for providing Hearing Loss Victim Services.

Communication Access

In accordance with state law (MGL, c.6 section 191-199), MCDHH's subject matter expertise regarding deafness and hearing loss results in state services becoming available and accessible to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. MCDHH partnered with the Jury Commission to ensure that Deaf individuals receive the necessary access to fulfill their obligation to serve as jurors. MCDHH also advises the Executive Office of Trial Courts with procedures for ASL interpreters, CART, and Video Remote Interpreting in court and other legal situations.

During FY2018, MCDHH handled more than 29,531 requests with a 75% fill rate for communication access. These requests equal 55,808 hours of communication access. This level of service demand and utilization continues in FY2019 with medical and specialized healthcare representing the greatest need. We respond to this service mandate through managing a Master Contract (MCD01) which provides the state with a workforce of 300 freelance/contracted interpreters and six Communication Access and Real-Time Translation (CART) providers.

Critical Priorities for FY2020

MCDHH is focused on four urgent service needs as summarized below.

Workforce Development

The demand for communication access services annually exceeds the capacity of our workforce. MCDHH is leveraging both technology and human resources to develop workforce capacity. During FY2019, MCDHH is continuing to partner with the Office of the Trial Court to pilot test use of remote technology for communication access. This is a strategic initiative to increase access by using courtroom telecommunications technology to enable a legal interpreter or CART services to be streamed into a courthouse from a distance.

We have established strategic partnerships with several two and four year academic institutions to increase the number of individuals completing college who are qualified to work as interpreters and sign language fluent human service providers. During FY2019, we will establish a workgroup to increase the number of individuals who can become CART service providers.

Early Childhood Education/Early Language Acquisition

MCDHH hosts a workgroup, with support from DESE, Early Education and Care, DPH Early Intervention and DPH Newborn Screening, to address the devastating consequences of delayed language acquisition and address the critical need for early childhood education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. A 17 member interagency/interdisciplinary Task Force meets quarterly to analyze data and infrastructure and make recommendations for leveraging existing resources. The Task Force is charged with identifying strategies for ensuring early language acquisition for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, aged 0-5, and leverage the expertise of MCDHH Children's Specialists to support public schools. The Task Force is finalizing a best practices document for families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.

Hearing Aids

The most frequent callers to MCDHH are elders and their families who need assistance with obtaining hearing aids. The average cost is \$5-7,000 dollars and is rarely covered by health insurance. MCDHH provides referrals to audiologists and hearing aid vendors, but the final cost is often prohibitive. Financial assistance is necessary to allow individuals to maintain their employment, independence, and safety.

Recovery Coaching as a Component of SUD Services

One MCDHH case manager has been trained as a recovery coach, supervisor and trainer. She is presently supervising 20 Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals who are working towards certification as recovery coaches, making Massachusetts the first state to make this resource available. MCDHH is committed to working with DPH and EHS to credential and employ these exceptionally skilled, bilingual, and culturally experienced coaches. There is an ongoing commission, chaired by Secretary Sudders, that is charged with creating standards and training for the licensing of these individuals in accordance with Chapter 208 of the Acts of 2018.

Fiscal Year 2020 Outlook

H.1 allocates \$6.1M for MCDHH. This figure is a \$154 K (2.6%) increase over FY19 estimated spending, and will fund MCDHH at a level 281 K (5%) over the FY19 GAA.

H.1 provides level funding for core human services in Interpreter and CART Referral, Bilingual Case Management and Children's Services, Communication Access Technology and Training Services, and Special Projects Coordination.

DHILS will be funded at \$1,841,640 a slight increase of 3% (\$53,640) as required under Ch. 257 implementation. The contract covers eight regions to improve statewide coverage.

MCDHH will continue to collect revenue from interpreter service fees, which are reinvested to protect and stabilize communication access in situations where there is no other responsible entity.

- Line item 4125-0122 records chargeback revenue with a ceiling of \$350,000, collected from interpreter utilization by state agencies within EOHHS and other secretariats
- Our Expendable Trust 4125-0104, records revenue estimated at \$350,000 from other public and private entities and is generated from fees for interpreter services.

All revenue is re-invested as follows:

- Contracted interpreters to increase availability to meet interpreting demands from state agencies, courts, and consumers.
- Workforce development training to increase existing interpreters' skills for work in medical and legal settings.
- Interpreter/CART services to constituents in situations where there is no funding and or no other responsible entity.
- Interpreters/CART for inter-agency meetings or collaborations where communication access is not otherwise funded.

Conclusion

The proposed FY2020 budget, allows MCDHH to remain fully committed to our priorities: accessible communication, education, and advocacy to consumers and private and public entities so that programs, services and opportunities for healthcare, independence, and resilience are fully accessible to Deaf and Hard of Hearing adults and children in Massachusetts. We at MCDHH look forward to continued collaboration and partnerships with the Legislature and our constituents. Thank you for your continued support, and for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing FY2020 budget. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.