

*We May Not Hear...But We Must Be Heard!*



**2007 Report  
to the Governor, Legislature  
And Supreme Court  
of the State of Florida**

**Florida Coordinating Council  
for the  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

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**Initiated by the 2004 Legislature,  
Section 413.271, Florida Statutes**

***Mission:** To serve as an advisory and coordinating body which recommends policies that address the needs of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind, as well as methods that improve the coordination of services among public and private entities and to provide technical assistance, advocacy and education.*

## Why is it important to have a Council representing people with hearing loss?

**Nearly 3 million Floridians are deaf or hard of hearing... impacting countless others whose lives are affected by family members with hearing loss**

There is a prevailing assumption that agencies serving people with all disabilities equally serve people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

This is **NOT** the case. Instead, persons with hearing loss are frequently shunted between agencies or to not-for-profit Deaf Service Centers that are not funded to provide intensive ongoing social services.

Hearing loss is an invisible disability, and the needs of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing are not being recognized or adequately addressed.

The FCCDHH has the responsibility of conducting quarterly meetings around the state. Since its inception, the Council has held, to-date, ten quarterly meetings. A public hearing and comment period is a necessary component of each meeting and is the primary means by which vital issues of concern to citizens are communicated to the Council.

### Summary of Public Comment

Public comment has been received from over 200 persons. A summary of issues raised includes:

- (a) Across-the-board enforcement of ADA regulation of accessibility rights and responsibilities;
- (b) Educating anyone who serves the public about accessibility rights and responsibilities;
- (c) Licensure of sign language and oral interpreters; and
- (d) More certified Communication Access Real-time Translators (CART) providers (only 10 in state!).

## Public Comment has repeatedly revealed a lack of:

- accessibility in medical settings, hospitals and doctors' offices, which affects quality of care (sign language interpreters, oral interpreters, CART providers, Support Service Providers (SSP), assistive listening devices)
- equal access to information during emergency situations, which can be life threatening
- fair treatment via true communication access in law enforcement situations
- accessibility during court proceedings, which can result in unequal application of justice
- qualified broadcast captioners for television broadcasts thereby limiting information access
- qualified interpreters and CART providers in education, which results in poor educational attainment thereby affecting vocational goals and future hiring options
- training programs, referral services, and funding mechanisms for Support Service Providers (SSPs) as necessary supports to the independence of persons who are deaf-blind
- knowledge about service animals, their capacity to contribute to individual independence and the legal rights of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing to use service animals in public settings
- equal access in airports and other public transportation venues, resulting in missed opportunities to receive safety information and make travel connections
- appropriate safety and access equipment in hotels, resulting in a higher chance of death or injury if an emergency were to occur
- affordability of visual fire alarms, hearing aids, cochlear implants and insurance coverage
- quality of CapTel speech-to-text translation of telephone calls to persons who are hard of hearing
- equal access to job opportunities for well-qualified persons who are deaf/hard of hearing and commitment to education accessibility

**Public comments reinforce the recommendation of the 2005 FCCDHH Report to:**

- **Establish a state agency responsible for addressing issues of citizens who are Deaf or hard of hearing; OR**
- **Enhance the network of public/private funded regional service centers to adequately provide necessary assistance and support to improve the disparate and inadequate treatment of individuals with hearing loss.**

Florida is the *fourth largest* state in the U.S. and has the **second highest** percentage of population who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind.

**Currently in Florida:**

- There is no single state program responsible for deaf and hard of hearing issues and services.
- The communication accessibility needs of persons who are deaf and hard of hearing affect every medical practice, school district, government agency, the Governor's Office and the Legislature.
- Minimum standards identified by ADA and state statute are not implemented in all areas of services and accessibility (e.g., transportation, emergency response, service provider competency).

- Where standards are known and acknowledged there is a lack of compliance by employers, businesses, and government agencies in providing appropriate accessibility accommodations as defined by federal law and state statute.
- Inconsistent services are provided by 15 small regional deaf and hard of hearing service centers that are private, non-profit organizations dependent on local funding and private donations.
- There is a lack of funding for services and a lack of accessibility accommodations for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing that varies by geographic region, causing some citizens to be unable to participate in their communities, to learn to their potential, to earn to their potential, or to access publicly funded services.
- When accessing medical care or legal services, persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened or deaf-blind are often denied accommodations that allow them to fully understand the issues and recommendations provided by these professionals.

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**Can the Council alone address these issues?**

The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is comprised of 13 Governor-appointed volunteer members and four state agency designees and has an advisory, coordination, and information focus with very limited resources (\$250,000). The Council alone **cannot** adequately address the accessibility issues that have been clearly identified as occurring within Florida.

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**A harsh contrast**

Many persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind require supports and services to be fully independent and productive citizens. It is estimated that there are approximately five times as many Florida citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing (16% of population) compared to the number of persons who are blind or visually impaired (3%). Approximately half of persons with significant hearing loss are of workforce age. The unemployment rate for adults who are deaf or hard of hearing is 40% with an additional 40% being underemployed, whereas the unemployment rate for persons with visual impairment is 74% and over 80% for persons who are deaf-blind. Expenditures by the state to provide needed services to persons who are developmentally disabled, blind or visually impaired, or deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind vary enormously.

The purpose of the contrast below is **NOT** to imply that any of the funding used to meet the needs of citizens who are blind, visually impaired, deaf-blind or individuals who have developmental disabilities is unnecessary or that this funding should be diverted. The purpose is to illustrate that funding has been made available to meet the needs of citizens with certain types of disabilities and that a vast disparity in funding exists.

**COMPARISON OF FUNDING RESOURCES FOR THREE (3) DISABILITY GROUPS  
(Governor’s Recommendations for FY 2006-07)**

Persons with Developmental Disabilities	Persons who are Blind/Visually Impaired	Persons who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing
General revenue \$472,704,923	General revenue \$13,945,691	General revenue \$0
Trust Funds \$658,718,688	Federal Funding Sources \$35,164,033	Funds carved from the from the Department of Health budget \$250,000
Total of funds included \$1,131,423,611	Total of funds included \$49,109,724	Total of expenditures identified \$250,000
Approximate per person funding (~44,000) \$25,700	Approximate per person funding (~53,000) \$927	Approximate per person funding (~3,000,000) \$00.08
Salaried positions 3,703	Salaried positions 306	2 partially funded positions from Council budget equaling <1 FTE
Established programs in Agency for Persons with Disabilities Developmental Services Public Facilities Home and Community Services Program Management and Compliance	Established Programs in Division of Blind Services Blind Babies Program Children’s Program School-to-Work Program Independent Living Program Vocational Rehabilitation Program Business Enterprises Program Braille and Talking Book Library Orientation and Adjustment Center Vending Food Services Facilities for the Blind	There are no programs <u>specific</u> to serving the needs of persons with hearing loss, other than the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind.  There is no funding <u>specific</u> to serving families of infants identified with hearing loss or the needs of child and adult populations outside of funding for overall early intervention, education or vocational rehabilitation services.  Note: DVR did expend \$12,956,901 on 6837 people with hearing loss in 2005-2006 (\$1895/ person) meaning less than 1/2 of 1% of the estimated Florida workforce with hearing loss received DVR services.
Source: <a href="http://www.ebudget.state.fl.us/BDServices.aspx?AgencyID=67000000&amp;PolicyID=&amp;PolicyLevel=">http://www.ebudget.state.fl.us/BDServices.aspx?AgencyID=67000000&amp;PolicyID=&amp;PolicyLevel=</a>	Source: Kurt Ponchak, Division of Blind Services. 850-245-0300	Source: Department of Health, Liaison to the FCCDHH. 850-245-4913

**The FCCDHH 2007 Recommendation:**

**Establish a single oversight body**

within state government with responsibility and policymaking authority to address the needs of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deaf-blind. At the discretion of the Governor, the functions of this oversight body could be:

1. Assigned to an existing agency;
2. Included under an expanded version of the FCCDHH;
3. Provided for under a memorandum of agreement that establishes an ongoing interagency committee to accomplish these functions; or
4. Established through some other avenue to define responsibilities of the various functions and responsibilities appropriate to this oversight and policy body.

**An oversight and policy body could:**

1. Set standards for and have the authority to monitor implementation of standards for accessibility accommodations.
2. Facilitate accessibility to medical and legal services.
3. Expand and improve the delivery of services and supports via development of an established network of collaborating resources (an example of such a network is the regional autism (CARD) centers supported by general revenue since 1990: 2006-2007 Governor's Recommendations \$10,218,000. Source: <http://www.ebudget.state.fl.us>)
4. Encourage recruitment of sign and oral interpreters.
5. Facilitate training of Communication Access Realtime Translators (CART) for the deaf or hard of hearing and Support Service Providers (SSPs) for persons who are deaf-blind.
6. Regulate credentialing/licensure of accessibility providers as necessary to maintain appropriate quality of services (estimated budget for 5 years: \$1,800,000 per FCCDHH 2006 report). For an example of a state commission that provides interpreter oversight [http://www.srskansas.org/kcdhh/text/interpret\\_info.htm](http://www.srskansas.org/kcdhh/text/interpret_info.htm).

**Accomplished activities of the FCCDHH include:**

1. Extensive investigation leading to completion of a 2005 Report to the Governor with sweeping recommendations for cohesion of comprehensive services for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind at [http://www.fccdhh.org/pdf/2005\\_reporttogovernor.pdf](http://www.fccdhh.org/pdf/2005_reporttogovernor.pdf).
2. Extensive research leading to completion of a 2006 Report to the Governor with recommendations for establishing licensure of sign language interpreters at [http://www.fccdhh.org/pdf/2006\\_reporttogovernor.pdf](http://www.fccdhh.org/pdf/2006_reporttogovernor.pdf).
3. Development of a website ([www.FCCDHH.org/](http://www.FCCDHH.org/)) for information and referral purposes.
4. Development of a Public Service Announcement informing the public of accessibility rights of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
5. Increasing the number of television stations complying with the FCC mandate to provide captioning of all new programming.
6. Formation of a medical accessibility task force of FCCDHH and Florida Hospital Association representatives working in concert to develop and distribute a comprehensive accessibility guide for hospital personnel – publication December 2006; (Train the Trainer Seminar for Hospital Administrators – Spring 2007; and an Accessibility Training video – Fall of 2007).
7. Increased awareness of accessibility issues pertaining to emergency preparedness and response planning at local and state levels.
8. Increasing the network of movie theaters that offer captioning.

**Upcoming meetings of the FCCDHH:**

- February 22 & 23, 2007, Tallahassee Ramada Conference Center 2900 No. Monroe Street
- May 10 & 11, 2007 West Palm Beach, exact location TBA

**Contact:** For additional information please contact the Council's administrative assistant, Mary Grace Tavel

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## **MEMBERS OF THE FLORIDA COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING:**

Joan Haber, Chair, Sarasota, Hearing Loss Association of Florida (HLA-FL)  
Rick Kottler, Vice-Chair, Stuart, Deaf Service Center Association (DSCA)  
Carol Christopherson, Jacksonville, Hearing Loss Association of Florida (HLA-FL)  
Julie Church, Dunedin, Parent of Child with Hearing Loss  
Randy Ellsworth, Clermont, representing Hearing Instrument Specialists  
Tanya Ward English, Cooper City, Communication Access Realtime Translator (CART)  
Carolyn Franklin, Tallahassee, Department of Health  
Laurie Gaylord, Hobe Sound, Florida Alexander Graham Bell Association  
Evan Goldman, Coconut Creek, Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA)  
Stan Gustetic, Ponte Vedra Beach, representing Audiologists  
Sarah Harris, Pinellas Park, Florida Association of the Deaf (FAD)  
John Jackson, Tallahassee, Department of Children and Families  
Joe Naulty, Wellington, an individual who is deaf-blind  
Lisa Schaefermeyer, Land O' Lakes, Florida Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (FRID)  
Christopher Wagner, Bradenton, Florida Association of the Deaf (FAD)  
Eloise Williams, Tallahassee, Department of Elder Affairs  
Position Currently Vacant, Tallahassee, Department of Education

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Karen Anderson, Tallahassee, Department of Health Liaison to Council  
Mary Grace Tavel, Tallahassee, Administrative Assistant to Council

<http://www.FCCDHH.org>

Refer to the FCCDHH website for specific locations, agendas, and an archive of past meeting minutes.