

**FLORIDA COORDINATING COUNCIL
FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
Virtual Quarterly Meeting**

Thursday, May 11, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Members Present: Glenna Ashton (FAD), Cory Parker (DOE/VR), John Jackson (DCF), Karen Goldberg (HLAA), Gina Halliburton (FRID), Cindy Simon (Audiologists), Jenny Rojas (Department of Elder Affairs)

Department of Health Staff: Sean Isaac, Angie Green

Service Providers: April Perry, Kelly Gagain, and Donna Flanders (Interpreters), Lisa Johnston (CART), Netza Rodriguez and Patrick Langan (A/V)

Minutes from February 9, 2023, Meeting:

Karen Goldberg made a motion to accept the minutes and it was seconded by John Jackson. The minutes were voted on and accepted.

Staff Updates: Angie Green provided the following:

- 1) Angie reported the appointments, new and old, are still in the review process.
- 2) Angie reminded everyone of the financial disclosure form due by June 30, 2023.
- 3) Angie reported the biennial report was still en route for approval.
- 4) Angie asked if everyone received Steven Zuilkowski's email.
- 5) Angie stated there was a total of 279 phone calls. Of those, 163 are related to the deaf and hard of hearing. General resources had a total of 43 calls. Service animal or related to service animal had 20 calls. Hearing aids assistance needed totaled 30 calls. Eight calls were ADA. Nine CIL calls. Nineteen calls were needing interpreters. Two calls needed help with newborn hearing screening. Two calls were mental health services needed. Two calls needed home health aide. There were 28 random calls, meaning wheelchair assistance, statistics for deaf per county, and getting GED help.

Organization Updates:

- 1) The Florida Association of the Deaf (FAD) had a board meeting on April 29, 2023, via Zoom, with 15 people showing up. FAD will host a booth at DSA, Deaf Seniors of America, at the end of June in Hollywood, Florida. The organization is rebuilding a new website and they're going to make Facebook and Instagram more active. FAD will be looking at the Bylaws. FAD is planning on having a conference again at FSBD, the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, in St. Augustine on October 28, 2023, which is around their homecoming. FAD will also have its elections in October.
- 2) The Hearing Loss Association of America Florida State Association (HLAA) held a quarterly meeting March 25, 2023, to discuss the future of the HLA Florida. Tenures are expiring June 1, 2023, and Debbe Hagner will be stepping down as the president of HLA Florida. HLA has a number of active chapters that have regular meetings and information for the public. HLA has a National connection and they are deciding if they would like to change the structure of their chapter. Tanya Williams, who served as a chapter coordinator and member coordinator, will be

stepping down as well. HLAAs will hold a conference in New Orleans with free registration. HLAAs will have a webinar May 18th called the Workplace and the Law.

- 3) The Department of Education and Vocational Rehabilitation (DOE/VR) has no updates to report.
- 4) The Florida Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (FRID) held a board meeting May 13, 2023.
- 5) The Florida Department of Children & Families (DCF) has no updates to report.
- 6) The Florida Department of Elder Affairs has no updates to report.
- 7) The Audiologists has no updates to report.

Committee Updates:

- 1) The Education Medical Technology Outreach (EMOT) has no updates.
- 2) The ad hoc Bylaws Committee has a cleaned-up copy of the bylaws in February. Mostly grammatical changes were made.
- 3) The Budget Committee stated expenses have been \$17,978 for year-to-date. The expenditures are \$11,429. The contract services year-to-date is \$36,025. The total surplus is in the red of \$849.
- 4) The Legislative Committee has just finished. There is nothing more to report.
- 5) The Web Committee is vacant.

Presentation: John Finch, ABLE United Director

ABLE is based on a piece of federal legislation known as the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act which passed in 2014. This allows states to create a tax advantage, savings, and investment account for individuals with a variety of disabilities. ABLE began in July 2016. It is run by The Florida Pre-paid College Savings Program. ABLE's requirements are regulated by the requirements to receive Social Security benefits.

It is a newly added section to the Internal Revenue Code, Section 529A. The mission is "to encourage individuals to save after-tax dollars to support health, independence, and quality of life." This is like a checking or savings account or a trust or a Roth IRA all rolled into one.

The ABLE account is owned by the individual with the disability but somebody else can manage it on their behalf. The funds in the ABLE account are disregarded for SSI and Medicaid. The money that is put in will grow tax-free and can be used for many expenses without impacting public benefits.

Individuals with a diagnosis prior to the age of 26 are eligible for an account. This age will be going up to 46 in January of 2026. The individual must have a severe disability to qualify for an ABLE account.

However, if the individual receives a cochlear implant, they automatically are not eligible for Social Security benefits and therefore would not be eligible for ABLE.

You can create an investment or a savings account or even both with a \$25 contribution. It is designed to "meet the needs of most investors by creating pre-designed portfolios." These accounts are managed by very large financial institutions such as Vanguard and Blackrock.

The funds deposited into an ABLE account are not considered income unless it's the individual's income. Anyone having a leftover 529 college savings plan fund, this can be rolled over to an ABLE account.

The individual can request to receive their money via check or an ABLE Visa pre-paid card. The earnings are tax-free if it is used for a qualifying earning expense. The money can be used for an upcoming doctor's appointment, co-pay, for attending classes, books, or tuition, housing and housing related expenses, taxes, a down payment on a vehicle or ride sharing to name a few. The expense must relate to

the individual's disability and if it helps to improve or maintain their health, independence, or quality of life.

There is no application fee or monthly maintenance fees. The investment options do have an investment advisor fee from 0-2.9% annualize on the account balance. The Visa card cost \$2.50 per month.

The program is backed by Florida pre-paid for over 30 years and has helped two million families.

Committee and Organization Information:

- 1) The EMOT Committee serves as a communication tool for their consumers. They take suggestions from the Council and collectively draft informational letters to their consumers.
- 2) The Legislative Committee follows bills to see if there is an impact on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. The Legislative Committee arranges annual appointments with Legislators prior to February quarterly meeting in Tallahassee, Florida.
- 3) The Florida Association of the Deaf, FAD, was established in 1917 The FSDB, Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, was established in 1885. There are four Deaf clubs. Many people in FAD are older, retired people. FAD works with FRID, Florida Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, in trying to pass bills that require licensing for sign language interpreters. FAD is a member of the National Association of the Deaf, NAD, that is based in Washington, D.C.
- 4) The FRID organization's goal is to improve the professional lives of interpreters, as well as the quality and accessibility of interpreting services for Floridians.
- 5) The V/R, Vocational Rehabilitation, is under the Department of Education. The goal of VR is to help people with disabilities maintain, regain, and access employment. VR provides assessments for their needs. There are three basic portions: consultation in the field, which is VR counseling staff and administration educate on deaf and hard of hearing and deafblind issues. General VR counselors. "The statute no longer provides for Deaf rehab counselors, and we are here to train with topics specifically related to hearing issues/hearing loss." Last, is to manage communication access from the initiation of a case until closure. The consumer age begins at 16 through adulthood.
- 6) HLAA started off under SHHH, Self-help for the Hard of Hearing. The name was later changed to HLAA and is a large group serving America's individuals with a variety of different hearing loss and types of hearing loss. The organization holds Walks4Hearing, they raise money, they propose legislation to make hearing aids more affordable. Legislation passed a law on over-the-counter hearing aids, which makes them more affordable for those with mild hearing loss.

New Business:

- 1) Glenna Ashton stated it would be nice to have a list of interpreting agencies per each county listed on the website.
- 2) The DSA has an upcoming conference at the end of June in Hollywood, Florida. Glenna will be a part of the Workshop Committee. There should be around 1,000 people in attendance.
- 3) RMTC (Resource Materials and Technology Center for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing) is having a conference about the education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- 4) RMTC, the Florida educators for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, are involved with teachers who educate Deaf children in mainstream schools. They participate in a conference every year and is in November of 2023 in Gainesville, Florida. RMTC is a wealth of information for the deaf and hard of hearing.

- 5) VR has a partnership with RMTC and National Deaf Centers, as well as State Deaf Education leaders and as a result have many resources for parents.
- 6) The Florida Association for the Deaf and Blind is a great resource. The Florida and Virgin Islands Deafblind Collaboration is a great resource as well.
- 7) Karen Goldberg stated that Zoom is too difficult to use. The Council cannot appropriately do their tasks with this type of limitation.
- 8) Glenna Ashton stated that basing the budget on the average spent in the past year does not allow for new ideas, new efforts to expand. Glenna stated that it should not be based on the past but on future projects and future activities.
- 9) Karen Goldberg stated she feels this is oppression. She feels Deaf communities have dealt with a sense of marginalize. Karen stated that with the budget getting smaller and smaller it's forcing the Council to use a format that does not work for this community. Karen stated that the State Legislature that the Council is mandated by, has a larger number than what is on the council now and the budget is being based on this smaller amount instead of the amount the Council should have total. Karen stated the budget should allow for in person meetings and for the Council to be able to attend Deaf events and have a presence so that the community in Florida knows that the State is there and cares and has this advisory council and wants to hear from them. She stated that it's not in compliance with the statute.
- 10) Glenna stated the Council will be working with Cecil Bradley to have a bill ready for legislation, which starts in January. This is the TASA bill. FTRI, Florida Telecommunications Relay Incorporated, is responsible for distribution of captioned phones and telecommunication devices. The budget from landlines is dwindling because of lack of home phones.
- 11) The election for Chair and Vice Chair took place. Glenna Ashton remains Chair and Cory Parker remains Vice Chair by acclamation.
- 12) Cory Parker stated using same space at the International Deaf Thing, the RP funding space in Lakeland, for the Expo. Glenna Ashton stated there's a space in Kissimmee where we could hold the expo. It is the hall where DeafNation has space.
- 13) Sean Isaac stated that the council may want to start planning and hosting this expo with other agencies and organizations.
- 14) Glenna Ashton suggested having the expo at the same time as it's quarterly meeting and that all council members get their organizations and agencies involved.
- 15) There was no quorum for the passing of the bylaws, so Karen Goldberg made a motion to move the vote to the next meeting. Cory Parker seconded that motion.
- 16) Karen Goldberg stated the Council needs to start promoting available seats to people who could fill them by contacting places like FSDB and Blossom Montessori School for the Deaf.
- 17) Cory Parker stated he was considering asking some of the Deaf Service specialist from the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) to see if they have any interest in joining the Council.
- 18) The Council would love to see a welcome orientation packet for new members.
- 19) Glenna stated that parents don't know their rights with their children's IEPs. When emergencies arise, like hurricanes, there are no interpreters, no captions. Covid brought about the use of CDIs, Certified Deaf Interpreters. They are trained and certified deaf interpreters.
- 20) Glenna stated that a large population of seniors in nursing homes are deaf or have some hearing loss. Glenna spoke of reaching out to the Agency for Healthcare Administration.

- 21) Jenny Rojas stated that the Department of Elder Affairs does not provide direct services to the elderly. Jenny stated that the Agency for Health Care Administration, AHCA, regulates all nursing homes, assisted living facilities, hospitals, and adult family care homes. If ADA accommodations are not being met or there are training needs for these places, that would be directed to AHCA.
- 22) Jenny Rojas stated that F4A, Florida Association for Area Agencies on Aging, is a group that takes care of a lot of the administrative lobbying for all the Area Agencies in Florida. John Jackson would like to check whether they provide statewide trainings and how that would happen. F4A does not provide statewide trainings for facilities as that would be under the Agency for Health Care Administration.

Public Comments:

Ursula is an interpreter from the Broward area. She wishes the interpreters were involved in the IEP process more. She wishes that signing students were required to take ASL, that it was a graduation requirement. She is in the IPP program.

Glenna stated the major concerns she receives when collecting public comments are the deaf needing an interpreter and finding affordable hearing aids.

Cory Parker makes a motion to close the meeting with Jenny Rojas seconding that motion.
Meeting adjourned at 4:22 p.m.