



MINUTES FOR DHHSC'S COMMUNITY COMMENTS

Saturday, August 26, 2023

11am - 1pm

I. Call to Order

II. Purpose

A. "Community Comments," an opportunity for the community to inform both DHHSC and the Board of Directors about the community's needs, wants, and other feedback in an ASL-accessible format.

III. Check-in / Board Member Introductions

A. Steve Longo, President

B. Nicole Hurt, Vice President

C. Jaime Johnson-Clay, Member at Large & Fundraising Committee

D. Jessica Lozano-Delgado, Member at Large

E. Patty Killough, Secretary

F. Ana Virnig, Treasurer - Absent

G. Christian Gentile, Member at Large & Fundraising Committee - Absent

III. Geographical Representation

A. Longo: It's important to understand that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service Center serves our local Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities [in Monterey, San Benito, Merced, Madera, Mariposa, Fresno, Tulare, and Kings Counties]. We serve quite a large span of California. We try to recruit members who can represent these geographical regions so that we can come together and have a robust discussion.

IV. Status Update by Board President

A. DHHSC is primarily funded by California Department of Special Services (CDSS) but also

depends on grants and interpreting revenues.

B. “DHHSC is always fighting to allocate funds to support our community.” DHHSC board members met with United Way staff in Visalia in 2021 to make a request for grant funding, and they were very impressed. They wanted to give us the funding on the spot; however, we had to go through “due process” before being awarded the funding.

C. The President of Fresno City College and the DHHSC board are “. . . working there to figure out how to advance funding for education because the president there believes in empowering families in order to support and encourage Deaf children, to dismantle the barriers, regardless of race or ethnicity, to be able to support these Deaf children and their families, and to be able to include these Deaf children in these circles.”

D. Goal: Visit families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children, determine needs, inspire motivation, and support educational needs.

V. Advisory Council Presentation by Jesse Lewis, DHHSC’s Project Director

A. “So I’m going to be talking about the Advisory Council. We must have a council in place for Fresno County.” The Advisory Council (AC) is made up of community members, and they meet to advise DHHSC staff of the community’s needs. The AC meets four times a year. The Fresno area requires eight local community members. Currently, there are no AC members.

B. No interest from present community members was expressed; Lewis advised community members to email DHHSC if interest arises.

C. In response to a question from Killough about advisory councils in other areas, Lewis advised that the other areas are also in need of advisory councils. Lewis added that each office location will be hosting events in the fall related to the advisory councils.

VI. Community Comments

A. Dr. Rosemary Rashad Wanis, previous DHHSC Director, sent in a video comment with concerns about the Central Coast (Salinas) office. Rosemary recently moved to Salinas from Fresno.

1. Rosemary expressed concern over the dramatic decrease in office space at the Salinas location.

2. When Rosemary was the Coordinator at the Salinas DHHSC office in 2000, the location had multiple offices, and now the current office is one room that only fits one staff. The office door does not have a window and the consumers must wait in the hallway until called in. There is a conference room across the hallway; however, the Salinas staff said hearing officemates (in other offices being rented out by hearing companies) have complained of noise made by Deaf members.

3. Response from Michelle Bronson, DHHSC Executive Director:

a) Due to the increase of expenses, including rent, and the initial budget cut, all outreach offices were down-sized.

b) There was no previous knowledge of complaints from nearby companies about noise levels; however, it will now be investigated.

c) It was confirmed that the office space is not large enough to host large groups of people; however, outside community spaces can be utilized for this purpose (i.e., schools, coffeehouses, etc.).

d) The Fresno DHHSC office is the only location owned by DHHSC; the other locations are rented.

e) DHHSC will continue to look for better locations that are also affordable and ADA accessible. CDSS funding will not be increasing; yet, rent will increase. The priority is staffing over office space.

B. Nicole Bruno, DHHSC Vice President

1. Available interpreters appear to be on the decline.

2. Interpreters are entering the field without the minimum skills required.

3. Interpreters appear to be moving out of the area and going to work for video relay companies.

4. Question to interpreters: What can we offer you to stay?

5. Sometimes interpreters are not showing up to assignments or showing up late, and it would be really helpful if the hiring agency could notify the clients and companies.

6. Bruno: Expressed appreciation for interpreters.

7. Discussed ideas to bring in more people for next year's Community Comments, including, but not limited to, a silent auction.

8. Response from Michelle Bronson, DHHSC Executive Director:

a) Interpreting Training Programs (ITPs) at different universities are struggling (right now, there are only two ITPs in California), and interpreters are completing the program but still not yet skilled enough to interpret.

b) DHHSC offers mentorship and support for new interpreters.

c) DHHSC often finds that when companies claim to have put in their interpreter request, further research determines that they did not actually make the request. It is unfortunate that DHHSC is often blamed for no interpreters, but we do not say "no" as some places claim and we do our best to fill the requests when we do receive them. To increase the chances of being able to fill requests, we need the requests at least two weeks in advance, not at the last minute as is commonly done by many businesses.

d) Bronson provided information about current ITPs.

C. Lozano-Delgado, Board Member

1. Expressed appreciation for DHHSC teaching her and her family ASL.
2. Voiced concern for Vallejo Unified School District not providing in-person speech therapists to all children in speech.
3. Advised of audiologist shortage.
4. Shared importance of parents learning to sign with their DHH children.

D. Valley Deaf Festival (VDF)

1. "It's a great opportunity for the community to see DHHSC, to come together, to have great conversations, enjoy good food, to network, to do some PR, and all of the things that you can do at VDF."
2. Although the price of the venue went up, the venue will remain the same. It is a large and comfortable venue.

E. Lauren Sanborn, Community Member

1. "I know that we'd like to collaborate with different organizations and communities. So my suggestion is maybe once every three months or so, we go to Salinas and host an event there, or Visalia, and that might be a way to draw more people and work collaboratively in the different locations where we have offices. It might be an opportunity to change things up and to garner more community interest. So that people aren't feeling alone in the areas where DHHSC has a smaller presence. It might be an opportunity also for a community to gather together and be able to share ideas."
2. DHHSC Board Member response: Agreed that it is a good idea for the board to rotate visits to hear what the other communities have to say without expecting everyone to commute to Fresno.

F. Killough, Board Member

1. Shared concern over ability for staff to share announcements with the community, for example, when an event is canceled without enough time for DHHSC staff to send an email or post an update to the Facebook feed. Some members do not have social media. Asked if a text announcement to all community members is possible.
2. Longo responded: A texting program is currently being tested to see if it could be used for this purpose and more.

VII. Adjourned