State Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report

Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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# Executive Summary

The 80th Legislative Session was the first session the Commission participated in as a stand-alone commission. In the biennium preceding the session, the Commission saw early on the scope and breadth of needs throughout Nevada is significant compared to the resources available to the Commission. As such, the Commission sought allies to help increase resources available to them. These efforts resulted in Senate Bill 93 (SB93) which ultimately passed through the Legislature and increase capacity of the Commission.

There was very little representation of this population in the hearings of bills related to the deaf and hard of hearing community. This prompted the Commission to conduct a series of three town hall meetings throughout Nevada to introduce themselves to the community and to hear from individuals across Nevada. These efforts were the first in what the Commission plans to be many such events to engage with the community. They were highly attended and very well received by the community.

The Commission was energized by the townhall meetings and is looking forward to focusing efforts on more community engagement through outreach and workshops. Education services also continues to be a priority. The priorities for SFY20 are to:

* Continue community engagement through townhalls, workshops on legislative advocacy, and mental health awareness events;
* Promote language acquisition and sound communication plans for Nevada schools; and
* Complete the online resource for people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

# Introduction

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf, Hard of hearing, or Speech Impaired was created through SB 481 in the 79th Legislative Session.The Commission authority includes making recommendations to any state agency, including, without limitation, the Aging and Disability Services Division (the “Division”) of the Department of Health and Human Services (the “Department”), concerning the establishment and operation of programs for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired to ensure equal access to state programs and activities. SB 481 also grants the Commission responsibility to recommend to the Governor any proposed legislation concerning persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired.

In the 80th Legislative Session, SB93 was passed which expanded membership and created authority for a full-time paid Director under the Nevada Aging and Disability Services Division. This effort as well as those outlined in the following report is instrumental to helping the Commission fulfill it’s mission to advocate on behalf of Nevadans who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired.

# 80th Legislative Session

The 80th Legislative Session was the first session the Commission participated in as a stand-alone commission. In the biennium preceding the session, the Commission saw early on the scope and breadth of needs throughout Nevada is significant compared to the resources available to the Commission. As such, the Commission sought allies to help increase resources available to them. These efforts resulted in Senate Bill 93 (SB93) which ultimately passed through the Legislature.

SB93 includes three basic provisions that will help the Commission move forward on the many goals of the Strategic Plan. These provisions include:

* Expansion of membership from 9 individuals to 11 individuals. See **Attachment A** for the current list of members and open positions;
* Paid Full-Time Director to coordinate and support Commission efforts through the TDD surcharge; and
* Continuation of state general funds of $25,000 per year for Administrative Expenses.

This bill also formerly changed the name of the Commission from the Commission for Persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Speech Impaired to the Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. While the Commission’s efforts still include advocacy for individuals who have speech impairments, dropping part of this name was critical due to the negative connotation of the word “impaired”.

In addition to the Commission’s own bill, the Commission offered testimony and public comment on the following bills:

* SB90 (In Support) – Ultimately this bill did not pass, but was a bill to require insurance companies to provide hearing aids.
* SB222 (Neutral) – Ultimately this bill did not pass but was incorporated into SB203 to establish a program for certain children to receive hearing aids through the Nevada Aging and Disability Services Division.
* SB203 (In Support) – This bill passed. In addition to the provision of hearing aids through ADSD (from SB222), this bill provides a mechanism for the Department of Education to develop and measure language acquisition skills for children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired or both deaf and blind.

# Strategic Plan

The importance of the Strategic Plan cannot be overstated as this plan is the management tool that directs all Commission activity. The Strategic Plan undergoes progress reviews and is updated annually. The Commission began tackling the Strategic Plan at its first meeting.

The Strategic Plan consists of four high level goals which are broken down into objectives with timelines. Goals:

* Ensure all Nevadan’s who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing and those with a speech Disability, have access to timely basic services.
* Develop a sufficient number of high-quality interpreters that are available to provide services to individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing and those with a speech Disability.
* Raise awareness about and support for individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing and those with a speech impairment.
* Develop family services and support necessary to adequately care for family members who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing and those with a speech disability.

The Commission’s priority for the biennium was focused on Education, specifically language acquisition and development. The Commission voted on two important measures:

* Present the Ohio Communication Plan template to the Department of Education as a potential policy for Nevada schools to implement. The Communication Plan is critical to ensuring students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or both deaf and blind have the appropriate supports to develop language acquisition skills that will serve them throughout their lifetimes. It is a critical piece that is missing in Nevada schools, Individualized Education Plan process.
* The Commission also voted to develop and implement workshops for both adults and children covering hostile environments, hate crimes and bullying. These efforts will be undertaken in the new state fiscal year.

At the beginning of state fiscal year 2020, the Commission will reviewed the strategic plan, made updates and set priorities for the coming year.

# Additional Accomplishments

While the legislative session included four bills relevant to people who are deaf or hard of hearing, there was very little representation of this population in the hearings of these bills. This prompted the Commission to conduct a series of three town hall meetings throughout Nevada to introduce themselves to the Community and to hear from individuals across Nevada. These efforts were the first in what the Commission plans to be many such events to engage with the Community. The Commission hosted events in Las Vegas, Reno, and Elko with representatives from:

* Communication Access Services Program (NV Aging and Disability Services Division)
* Deaf Centers of Nevada
* Nevada Association for the Deaf
* Nevada Hands and Voices

Each townhall gave the Commission the opportunity to see the unique perspectives in regions across Nevada.

## Las Vegas

* *June 18, 2019*. Approximately 45 individuals attended this meeting. The Community focused questions to the Nevada Deaf Association and Deaf Centers of Nevada, of interest to the community was Camp Sunshine. Community members also wanted clarification on contact information for the Communication Access Services program manager to be able to find out about services available through the program.

## Reno

* *June 26, 2019.* Approximately 25 individuals attended this meeting. This was a very interactive group with the following themes discussed:
	+ Increased collaboration within the community especially with politicians to present a united front; advocacy for the good of the community not just individual interests. Ensure more partnership between organizations serving the Deaf community to expand access to services and advocacy efforts.
	+ Educational interpreting and a deaf school are needed to help move the community forward. Overall, the quality of interpreters in the education system is not sufficient to ensure students are able to be successful.

## Elko

* *June 27, 2019.* Approximately 15 individuals attended this meeting. This was also a very interactive group with the following themes discussed:
	+ Communication Access especially in healthcare and education settings. There is a severe shortage of interpreting available in the area, which creates a lot of barriers for individuals.
	+ Overall, the Elko community is yearning for more representation and more services. They often feel like they are on an island with no one to advocate for them.

The townhalls were an invaluable opportunity to connect with community members and very well received. Overall, feedback was very positive, and the community is interested in more opportunities in the future. The Commission is planning SFY2020 outreach which will include additional townhalls, educational events on self-advocacy and legislative advocacy, as well as events geared towards mental health awareness.

The Commission and our partners acknowledge there were some challenges with CART and interpreters, but these provided valuable lessons learned for future events. During the Las Vegas meeting, CART was not working properly and was done remotely. Luckily, we were able to keep the meeting going while troubleshooting. Additionally, community feedback noted the setup of the interpreters made the presentations difficult to follow. This feedback will be used in future meetings to ensure CART and interpreter set up facilitates good communication.

# Next Steps

Going into state fiscal year 2020, the Commission is focused on updating the strategic plan, including significant revisions to focus the plan to the scope of the Commission. They are challenged by a number of vacant positions, some of which are pending appointment with the Governor’s office and some of which are still being recruited.

The Commission was energized by the townhall meetings and is looking forward to focusing efforts on more community engagement through outreach and workshops. Education services also continues to be a priority. The priorities for SFY20 are to:

* Continue community engagement through townhalls, workshops on legislative advocacy, and mental health awareness events;
* Promote language acquisition and sound communication plans for Nevada schools; and
* Complete the online resource for people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The updated Goals and Objectives for SFY20 is available on the [Commission website](http://adsd.nv.gov/Boards/NCPWADHHSI/Nevada_Commission_for_Persons_Who_Are_Deaf_Hard_of_Hearing_or_Speech_Impaired/http%3A/adsd.nv.gov/Boards/NCPWADHHSI/Nevada_Commission_for_Persons_Who_Are_Deaf_Hard_of_Hearing_or_Speech_Impaired/).

# Appendix A – Current Commission Members

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Position Description** | **Member Name** | **Affiliation** | **NOTES** |
| State Employee who represents programs that serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing  | Pending | NV DD Council | Catherine Nielsen - appointment pending at Gov office |
| Nevada Association of Deaf or a member who acts on the behalf of a member organization representing persons who are deaf or hard of hearing | Jeffrey Beardsley | NV Association of the Deaf | Re-appointment pending at Gov office |
| Parent of deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired child | Vacant |  | Vacant due to moving Eric Wilcox into new position.  |
| Executive Director of the Nevada Telecommunications Association or a member who represents the telecommunications industry | Michael Eifert | Nevada Telecommunications Association |   |
| Representative who is an educator in the state.  | Pending | NV Dept of Education  | Daina Loeffler – appointment pending at Gov office |
| User of telecommunication relay services | Eli Schwartz, Chair | N/A |   |
| Experience with or an interest in knowledge of the problems of services for the deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired | Maureen Fradianni | N/A |   |
| Representative of an advocacy organization whose membership consist of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired | Eric Wilcox, Co-Chair | NV Hands and Voices | Moved from “Parent of deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired child” position.  |
| Person who is deaf or hard of hearing | Pending |   | Susan Beckett – appointment pending at Gov office |
| Specialist in issues relating to employment of persons with disabilities | Pending | DETR | Laura Fink - appointment pending at Gov office |
| Parent or Guardian of a child who is less than 6 years of age and is deaf or hard of hearing | Vacant |   | New Position approved in Leg - pending recruitment |
| Commission Director | Cheyenne Pasquale | ADSD | Paid Director Position will replace once hired. |