



City of Salisbury
DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
September 12, 2019

Committee Members Present

Timothy Meagher, *Chairperson*
Gregory Tyler
Michael Dyer
Stephen Bullock
Dr. Katherine Jones

Committee Members Absent

Amy Crouse
Barbara Bell

In Attendance

Laura Baasland, *Department of Water Works Program Specialist*
Virginia Bender
Mike Purkey

The Disability Advisory Committee met at 3:00pm in Conference Room #306 of the Government Office Building

Call to Order

The Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) Meeting was called to order at 3:06pm by Mr. Meagher.

Introductions and Welcome

The meeting began with brief introductions of all in attendance, and greetings for the guest speaker.

Last Meeting Minutes Review

The minutes from the DAC's last meeting on June 13, 2019 were reviewed. On a motion put forth by Mr. Bullock and seconded by Mr. Tyler, the minutes were approved by unanimous vote in favor.

Guest: Mike Purkey, Executive Director of Deaf Independent Living

Mr. Purkey gave a brief history of Deaf Independent Living Association (DILA), explaining that DILA was founded in the Frederick, Maryland in the mid-twentieth century after a Rubella outbreak that resulted in many children being born deaf. When these children graduated from the School for the Deaf, they didn't have a place to go afterwards, so parents created that place with a grant from Housing and Urban Development (HUD). DILA is a nonprofit that provides housing to deaf individuals with developmental delays, and a multitude of other services including outreach and interpretation. As an organization, DILA has undergone many changes and have recently expanded to re-offer programs that were once cut. In recent years, DILA has gone from having no relationship with the School for the Deaf to accepting new referrals, and they have opened four new sites—housing locations where individuals are placed three to a home. Today, DILA is even working on expanding back into Frederick to address unmet needs in that region.

Mr. Purkey explained that what makes DILA different from other organizations that provide services to the deaf is that DILA is not a group home—its mission to encourage individuals to live independently by providing necessary support and resources. DILA is sometimes met with resistance by the State who would like DILA to have more control over its participants, but DILA aims to assist deaf individuals to be able to live independently and not dictate their lives.

At this time, DILA has thirteen contracted interpreters, including those that served at the National Folk Festival on September 6, 7, and 8 2019. DILA works with the interpreter network of the Eastern Shore and contracts with independent interpreters around the region. As an alternative to interpretation, video carts are sometimes offered to deaf individuals, but this is an impersonal and imperfect solution.

Deaf individuals face several practical barriers in a world designed by and for the hearing. One such example that Mr. Purkey gave was that of a deaf couple he knew that raised two hearing children. The couple had to reverse-engineer a baby monitor to wake them if their child was awake since no such baby monitor existed. Using their alarm clock that shook the bed, they were able to re-work the concept to be able to shake their bed if there was movement in the baby's crib. Homes, including those used by DILA, must be outfitted to be deaf-friendly, which includes things like flashing strobe light fire alarm, flashing doorbells, and video phones. Mr. Purkey stated that it costs approximately \$5,000 per residence to make a home deaf-friendly.

Communication continues to be the biggest barrier to deaf individuals in our community. Mr. Purkey explained that not all sign language is the same—older individuals tend to fingerspell much more and sign English, while younger individuals tend to sign more American Sign Language (ASL). It is important to understand that ASL is its own language, not simply signed gestures for English words. Not all deaf people know English because that is not their language—ASL is—or because they are not from here and know another spoken language. For this reason, written communication with deaf individuals is not always possible, and simply passing notes

back and forth will not work. This can make doing everyday tasks difficult, and even dangerous at times. Mr. Purkey explained that going to the doctor and being able to communicate with healthcare professionals is a significant concern. Not all agencies provide interpreters to deaf individuals, and even those that do are still sometimes face with language barriers. Some places offer a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) who then explains the interpretation to the deaf individual so that they can understand what is being communicated. It is also a fallacy that lip reading is a reliable method of communication with deaf individuals; in actuality only one-third of deaf individuals can read lips.

Ms. Bender asked Mr. Purkey what challenges deaf individuals face when they go to vote, and Mr. Purkey explained that no one is allowed to enter the polls to assist deaf individuals with casting their ballot, not even interpreters, because it has the potential to result in inappropriate influence. In order to overcome this obstacle, DILA practices voting with its members including explaining each candidate and their platform to them, and they review sample ballots and are shown how to select which candidate they choose, this way they know exactly how to complete a ballot at the polls. It still remains to be a significant challenge to convince deaf individuals to vote, however.

Mr. Dyer asked Mr. Purkey what challenges deaf individuals face in their interaction with the City of Salisbury, and Mr. Purkey explained that they face very few barriers with the City itself because they have little interaction with the City. When it comes to City services, most of that communication is handled through their interpreter or counselor, so they individuals themselves are not involved with the City much at all.

Mr. Purkey informed the group that in October 2019, a training will be held with the Wicomico County Sheriff, Salisbury Police Department, and Salisbury University Police Department on how to interact with deaf individuals. Communication barriers between police and the deaf can be a serious and have in the past been fatal, so it is very important that this issue is addressed. Additionally, on September 18 and 19, 2019 the annual Emergency Preparedness Throughout Life will be held at the Wicomico Youth and Civic Center. The event includes financial planners and healthcare workers and many other professionals who are there as a resource to many deaf and blind individuals. Mr. Purkey often gets asked what his clients want, and his answer is simple: they want the same things you do—to live a “normal” life and to do things like go on vacation.

Accessibility Concerns at USPS on Rt. 50

Mr. Meagher explained that a Salisbury citizen and concerned resident named Virginia Vitello has been facing accessibility concerns at the United States Post Office on Route 50 in Salisbury, Ms. Vitello has limited mobility and is unable to open the Post Office front entrance doors and would like to see this issue remedied to make the Post Office accessible to her and others with physical limitations as well. Ms. Vitello has contacted the Post Office herself to voice her concerns, as well as the Postmaster General, the Mayor, Mrs. Baasland, Mr. Meagher, Congressman Harris, and local

news agencies. Unfortunately, because the United States Post Office is a federal agency, the City of Salisbury has no regulatory authority over them and cannot require them to make any changes to their building. The best that the City can do is advocate on Ms. Vitello's behalf in the form of a letter to the Postmaster's General's office urging them to please take into consideration accessibility concerns at post offices within the City of Salisbury. On a motion brought forth by Mr. Dyer and seconded by Dr. Jones, the committee voted by unanimous vote in favor to recommend formally to the Mayor that he send a letter to the Postmaster General's office advocating on behalf of Ms. Vitello.

Youth Engagement Strategies and Efforts

Mr. Bullock is working with a professor at WorWic Community College to engage youth in disability advocacy. The specific course is a Tri-County (Somerset, Wicomico, Worcester) class for certificate students. The course has a self-advocacy component that would align well with this effort. Mr. Bullock will have an update for the committee in December.

Agency Updates

Mr. Meagher told the committee about the Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (BISM) summer camp program for area youth. BISM was host site for a local program of the National Federation of the Blind for school-blind school-children Braille Enrichment Literacy and Learning (BELL) academy. There were many activities jam-packed into the two-week program, and children even visited the new swimming pool at the Bay Area Center for Independent Living (BACIL). Dr. Jones discussed that she has faced many challenges in getting the BACIL pool re-opened and that that day invigorated her and focused her efforts to keep the pool open.

Mr. Dyer spoke about changes in funding from the Developmental Disability Administration and explained that as of July 1, 2020 payments will no longer be given out quarterly in advance but will instead be reimbursed monthly. Many Maryland providers are nonprofits who will face serious instability due to this change. Dr. Jones explained that BACIL uses the Long-term Support Services Maryland that Mr. Dyer mentioned, and although there was a steep learning curve, they enjoy it now. Dr. Jones offered for Mr. Dyer to come to BACIL to see the software in action and get some experience with it beforehand.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for Thursday, December 12, 2019 at 3:00pm in conference room 306 of the Government Office Building.

Adjournment

On a motion by Ms. Crouse and seconded by Mr. Bullock and passed by unanimous vote in favor, the DAC meeting was adjourned at 4:21pm.

Minutes Recorded By: Laura Baasland, *Department of Water Works Program Specialist*

