



**STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
COMMISSION FOR DEAF & HARD OF HEARING**

*Quarterly Board Meeting  
Thursday, June 11, 2020  
3:00 p.m.*

*The meeting was held remotely via zoom and the public could view the meeting  
livestream on YouTube with interpreting and captioning at  
<https://youtu.be/sz2tNAp-RYo>.*

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**I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Chair Concha Dunwell called the meeting to order at 3:03 p.m. Executive Director Nathan Gomme called roll call.

Present: Ms. Concha Dunwell  
Mr. Mark Apodaca, designee for NMSD Superintendent  
Dr. Michael O'Brien, designee for DVR Director  
Mr. Francis Vigil  
Mr. Johnny Robertson

Quorum was met.

Five staff members from NMCDHH were present via Zoom: Executive Director Nathan Gomme, Deborah Romero, Lisa Dignan, Corina Gutiérrez, and Jessica Eubank. Jessica Eubank interpreted the meeting along with Andrea Ginn and Rachelle Clifford. Assistant Attorney General Delilah Tenorio was also present.

**II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chair Concha Dunwell asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

**20.12**

Commissioner Mark Apodaca made a motion to approve the agenda.

Commissioner Johnny Robertson seconded.

Ms. Romero took a roll call vote:

Commissioner Dunwell – Yes

Commissioner Apodaca – Yes

Commissioner O'Brien – Yes

Commissioner Vigil -Yes

Commissioner Robertson – Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

**III. APPROVAL OF MAY 7, 2020 MINUTES**

Chair Dunwell asked if there were any changes to the minutes from May 7, 2020.

**20.13**

Commissioner Johnny Robertson made the motion to accept the minutes as written.  
Commissioner Francis Vigil seconded.

Commissioner Dunwell – Yes  
Commissioner O’Brien – Yes  
Commissioner Robertson – Yes

Commissioner Apodaca – Yes  
Commissioner Vigil -Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

**IV. REPORTS**

***a. Executive Director Report***

Executive Director Nathan Gomme stated that the third quarter began with normal operating procedures. CDHH was proceeding with the budget planning for FY21 and was able to receive an increase in our general fund for services for Deaf-Blind, Deaf Plus and seniors. The focus was on SSP services and transportation. However, this now depends on the availability of general funds which is question due to the impact of COVID-19. COVID-19 has caused a decline in revenue from gas and oil prices as well as the collected revenue from GRT. With those funds depleting, we will need to see what will happen with the budget during the special session.

The City of Albuquerque passed the captioning ordinance successfully and it seems to be going well. Some rules need to be established, and a meeting was scheduled for stakeholders in March. Unfortunately, it had to be postponed since it coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19.

Executive Director Gomme discussed the relationship CDHH has developed with the Disability Emergency Planning and Advisory Council (DEPAC) and are in talks with them about a variety of different emergency situations that have barriers. One of those topics is the availability of Text to 911 across the state. Text to 911 is still being worked on so that the entire state will one day have it available. The discussions have been about fires and other emergent situations that can arise as well as the importance of a technology such as Text to 911.

CDHH hosted an FCC town hall in January. There were several deaf and hard of hearing community members there and they were able to ask questions of the FCC directly.

Just before COVID-19 hit we were able to add two new hires, Dennis Stidham and Myra Sandoval who are in Corina’s department.

***b. COVID-19 Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing Report***

Executive Director Gomme stated that he sent the commissioners a summary of all CDHH actions that have taken place since COVID-19 became an issue. He felt it was important to expand on some topics that were addressed in that summary.

First, staff are primarily teleworking from their homes rather than the office space and will not return until there are established procedures that we can keep the staff and our consumers safe. This includes having enough personal protective equipment (PPE) and using transparent barriers.

CDHH is also working with the Access and Functional Needs group which is comprised of stakeholders from many agencies. The group meets on a weekly basis and sometimes a few times a week to discuss current issues related to COVID-19 such as access to press conferences, to the internet, and services such as food deliveries. The group has already made an impact.

The Commission did some reanalyzing of our Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program (TEDP) because we realized that there are areas that need improvement with this pandemic. One of the issues is that there is a very significant lack of access to the internet in rural areas that needs improving. We need to focus on this in order for people to access the technology we provide. The Commission's vendor, Teltex, and CDHH were in discussions on how to address our rural and Native American communities. There was a lot of back and forth discussion on a plan of action for the future. One idea is that we would send tablets which include downloadable videos on the equipment so they can be delivered to areas where they are in need.

Relay New Mexico has had some large numbers due to this pandemic. In the last two weeks of March, there was a huge increase of numbers that amount to what we traditionally see during Christmastime. At Christmastime there generally is an increase in relay calls because people are home and that is when people are using relay services to make phone calls to their family and friends. Now businesses began to shut their doors to in-person traffic during the COVID-19 health emergency; people began calling places to access services which vastly increased the relay numbers. Relay operators nationally are not able to go to their workplace to the same level and are working from home, so there was a decline in time of answer. The FCC provided a waiver for speed of answering relay calls; this meant the possibility of longer waits to get an operator. There was also the issue of people calling with concerns about their rent or stimulus money which had long hold times this increased the minutes while relay operators were trying to reach these businesses and services. The numbers have been rising and we are seeing and will continue to see a huge increase.

Executive Director Gomme explained that meetings are changing as individuals and businesses are using Zoom, Adobe Connect, Cisco Webex, Google Meet and a variety of conferencing software. We at CDHH want to make sure they have access to captions and signed language interpreters. Some platforms don't have the same level of functionality and so there has been a lot of education and discussion on accessibility. Some platforms are just not as accessible for Deaf or Deaf-Blind users. Some Deaf-Blind users do have residual vision, so they require magnifiers to access content during teleconferences. Even when an individual is using a large monitor, the size of the individual caller becomes smaller when more people join, this means a lot of very small screens on the video call, and this is a barrier. Some platforms and systems are preset to reduce the size of the caller for the shared document, and you cannot manipulate the size; therefore, it does not provide an equivalent experience to the community.

There are also access limits to telehealth. A telehealth call must follow the rules of HIPAA and there is a lot of discussion about what you can or cannot do with telehealth. This is just one problem another for example is some telehealth programs can only be accessed on a smartphone or tablet for example, but not everyone has access to a smartphone or tablet. Some programs have captioning, but others do not. Some require a call-in list of approved participants which is fine for most but not interpreters, for example if there was a last-minute interpreter change, that interpreter would not be admitted to the phone call. There are so many challenges that will require significant education to the providers and the facilities.

Executive Director Gomme asked if there were questions regarding his report and there were some concerns about the revenue and budget for the upcoming fiscal year. However, there are several factors at play. He and CFO Deborah Romero have had many conversations regarding the budget. They were looking at where they can move money within each budget category. Perhaps certain programs will need to be re-prioritized. For example, there has been a reduction of requests for our equipment. If we streamline that inventory, we can shift resources to cover other needs. The same with can be done with Outreach. The trainings for example can be done in various video formats which would save money normally used in travel expenses. There may be an opportunity to use Federal funds through the CARES Act, but that needs to be worked out. The budget will be tight, but Executive Director Gomme felt that the agency would be all right.

Another question was regarding the placards for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Drivers. Although this is an important tool for APD and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, our priorities and the city's priorities have shifted during the pandemic as well as with the protests. CDHH has focused on access and relaying important information regarding health, safety, and changes during this time. Therefore, the placards are currently on hold.

Roger Robb has been very busy developing vlogs as things change in the COVID-19 world and sharing this critical information with the community. Both Ms. Dignan's and Ms. Gutiérrez's departments have been busy reaching out to State and local agencies to talk about accessibility needs and medical services. The entire staff is working very hard during this time.

Commissioner Francis Vigil made a few comments about groups he was concerned about that may be low-income and cannot afford mobile devices and the struggle of the Navajo Nation, hit hard by COVID-19 and in desperate to have communication access. At some point he would like to see an agenda item relating to how we can improve communication access for those groups.

Executive Director Gomme reiterated that one thing he is frequently bringing up with the Access and Functional Needs group is creating a place where there is access to the internet. It's an essential part of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing community's world to be able to use video phones, mobile devices, and captioning on those mobile devices. New Mexico has such a vast rural area where there is no internet service available. They have acknowledged that there is a great need for that in rural, homeless, and tribal communities. One of the areas we need to focus on is providing equipment that has access to the internet and then the Commission could have more interaction with these populations and the senior citizens as well. The Access and Functional Needs group has addressed the need of access in all kinds of services such as hospice, food services, and long-term care. Executive Director Gomme did feel like the most urgent need was on Native lands; and that has been the first thing that was addressed.

**c. Department Reports Q & A**

Commissioner Mark Apodaca had a question for Ms. Gutiérrez's department about if they were collaborating with other Commission or agencies for the Deaf in other state. Ms. Gutiérrez referred the question to Executive Director Gomme a member of is the National Association of State Agencies for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH). He said that this national association has a base camp website. From that website members can continuously share information with each other. So, for example, a visual tool for telehealth was developed in Massachusetts, moved to Wisconsin, and has been adapted to fit the needs of New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. The short answer is yes, CDHH does work with other state agencies on an ongoing basis.

**V. ACTION ITEMS**

There were no action items.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

**20.14**

Commissioner Johnny Robertson made a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Mark Apodaca seconded.

Ms. Romero took a roll call vote:

Commissioner Dunwell – Yes

Commissioner O'Brien – Yes

Commissioner Robertson – Yes

Commissioner Apodaca – Yes

Commissioner Vigil -Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori G. Neubauer

Lori G. Neubauer  
Administrative Operations Specialist