



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

*Quarterly Board Meeting
Thursday, March 11, 2021.
3:00pm*

*Minutes amended and approved at Board Meeting on 6/10/2021
The meeting was held remotely via Zoom and the public could view the meeting
livestream on YouTube with interpreting and captioning at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orHTQqoyVD4>*

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Concha Dunwell called the meeting to order at 3:04pm. Lori Neubauer, Administrative Operations Specialist, called roll call.

Present: Mrs. Concha Dunwell
 Dr. Rosemary Gallegos
 Dr. Michael O'Brien
 Mr. Francis Vigil
 Dr. Ronald Stern
 Mr. John Hooper

Quorum was met.

Six staff members from NMCDHH were present via Zoom: Executive Director Nathan Gomme, Deborah Romero, Lisa Dignan, Lori Neubauer, Trevor Brennan and Jessica Eubank. Jessica Eubank interpreted the meeting along with Andrea Ginn, Ashley Wachter and Melissa Leslie-Urist. Assistant Attorney General Delilah Tenorio was also present along with Thad Porch from Porch & Associates. Chrissy W. from ACS provided CART transcription.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

21.11

Commissioner Hooper made a motion to approve the agenda.

Commissioner Vigil seconded.

Ms. Neubauer took a roll call vote:

Commissioner Dunwell – Yes

Commissioner O'Brien – Yes

Commissioner Stern – Yes

Commissioner Gallegos – Yes

Commissioner Vigil – Yes

Commissioner Hooper – Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

III. **APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 10, 2020 MINUTES**

Chair Dunwell asked if there were any changes to the minutes from December 10, 2020.

21.12

Commissioner O' Brien made the motion to accept the minutes as written.

Commissioner Vigil seconded.

Ms. Neubauer took a roll call vote:

Commissioner Dunwell – Yes

Commissioner Gallegos – Yes

Commissioner O'Brien – Yes

Commissioner Vigil – Yes

Commissioner Stern – Yes

Commissioner Hooper – Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

IV. **REPORTS**

a. Auditor's Report

Thad Porch presented on the annual auditor's report. NMCDHH account practices have not changed year-to-year and there were no auditor findings or issues identified in NMCDHH accounting practices. CFO Deborah Romero was complimented on her recordkeeping, and assistance in making the audit process as easy as possible. Porch and Associates gave NMCDHH an unqualified, unmodified opinion, which is the best opinion possible. This is the third year in a row NMCDHH has received an unqualified, unmodified opinion.

Commissioner Hooper asked if the Commission would be able to tap in the stimulus package signed by President Biden earlier in the day for funding. Mr. Porch did not know the answer to that question.

Chair Dunwell asked what the long-term financial implications of not receiving the special appropriation would be for the commission and also asked if it would be possible to reduce the contribution to the State Treasurer General Fund Investment Pool. Mr. Porch said this would present a challenge for the Commission, as there is only so much more cost-cutting that can be done. Mr. Porch asked Executive Director Gomme if he had anything to add and Mr. Gomme explained that a lot of the federal funding is assigned to specific areas and that we can only address this upcoming year in terms of general funds and our budget and that he would explain more in his report.

Chair Dunwell and Commissioner Hooper thanked Mr. Porch for his report and commended Ms. Romero and her staff for a job well done.

b. Executive Director Report

Executive Director Gomme shared that he was currently busy with the NM State Legislative Session, specifically working on House Bill 2, the general appropriations act for 2021, which contains the Commissions budget appropriation. Mr. Gomme has requested additional general funding for the next fiscal year and there are also discussions about a small appropriation in a junior bill to create additional funding. Mr. Gomme had a chance to explain to the house finance committee that with everything we have done, the only way to improve our revenue collection is to change the calculation method for taxes from a percentage to a flat rate concept. These changes will not happen this legislative session. We needed to provide TRD with enough time to examine the issue, and possible financial models if the change is made. We believe that this method would work better to fund the commission given that

carriers have changed their billing mechanism which has impacted our revenue. There has been no additional revenue created by the move from 4G networks to 5G for example and they bundle several things into the cost of the equipment instead of the specific phone bill. Outside of this specific bill we are keeping an eye out for other bills and during this legislative session the Commission has been able to work with Legislative staff in training them best practices for communication access, such as video spotlighting and closed captions.

The Commission has been able to save a good amount of money this year due to the lack of travel due to the Pandemic and having several resources purchased prior to this pandemic. However, when this health crisis is over, we will need to serve the constituents of this state in all areas, rural and metro. Savings that are occurring now, will not be happening when the Commission is able to return to in person services.

Chair Dunwell asked about the possibility of working from home continuing for Commission staff after the pandemic is over and reducing travel to save money. Mr. Gomme said that the Commission was very fortunate to be in a good position in some areas prior to the pandemic; it had laptops ready for staff, staff were already familiar with virtual meeting software, and had already utilized technology to provide education and advocacy through virtual means. However, New Mexico is a largely rural state, and NMCDHH still needs to provide services to those who do not have access to high-speed internet, we do not want them to feel excluded. In the legislature, there is a lot of support right now to strengthen and expand broadband access, with two bills under consideration. When the pandemic is over, NMCDHH will have to work to find a balance and support all constituents, and the Commission is exploring a hybrid model. However, nothing is set yet, and the Commission is still awaiting re-opening guidance from the state, and there are no plans to return to the office at this time.

Regarding National travel, again there is none planned for FY2021. However, NMCDHH must still maintain its national representation among agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Registry of interpreters for the Deaf (RID), and the National Association for the Deaf (NAD). Director Gomme has not left the state in over a year and utilizes all technological and virtual resources at his disposal to maintain a national representation with these organizations. New Mexico was supposed to host the national NAD leadership conference next year, it has now been canceled. A National relay service conference has been canceled, as well as the Telecommunications Distribution Administration Conference. NMCDHH staff will attend virtual national conferences if appropriate for the next Fiscal Year.

Regarding the COVID-19 vaccination process; The Commission assisted in ensuring that ASL interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP's) were added to the 1a vaccination tier. To date, 123 interpreters, that we know of, have been vaccinated as well as 14 SSP's. The purpose for placing them in this tier was to ensure that Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (HOH) have access for medical appointments and transportation services. There is continuous communication between NMCDHH, the Department of Health (DOH) and other disability groups regarding accommodation needs and feedback from the community. The Commission is hearing that some Deaf people are also starting to receive the vaccine, and this largely depends on location and availability of the vaccine. Overall New Mexico has done an incredible job for everyone in the state and is #1 in vaccine distribution nationwide.

We are now focusing on finetuning the system for others. The Commission wants to ensure that the Deaf, HOH, Deaf-Blind, and Speech Disabled communities are not going to different locations and having different experiences for the vaccines. Roger Robb has also been non-stop in making informational ASL VLOGS for the community regarding the vaccine process. We have seen interpreters added to various press conferences from various departments during the year when they discuss the changes in the state as it relates to the vaccine distribution.

Commissioner Stern asked if there was any information regarding issues of equitable distribution of the vaccine for minority populations and other vulnerable populations. Director Gomme said from his

observations, the biggest issue is technology access disparity, being able to register for the vaccine is one example. The Community Outreach Program for the Deaf (COPD) is assisting the Deaf-Blind community in filling out registration forms, and the Commission is constantly looking for ways to improve the process.

c. Department Reports Q & A

There were no questions on the Community Advocacy or Community Engagement reports. Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Deborah Romero requested time for two announcements: Lori Neubauer, after 14 years of dedicated service is retiring at the end of April. Director Gomme and Ms. Romero both commented that Ms. Neubauer has been a bedrock of the community and will be sorely missed. Today's board meeting will be her last. The Commission received approval from the state for a short-term double fill, so that Ms. Neubauer's replacement could be trained before she retires. The commission hired Trevor Brennan to replace her as Administrative Operations Specialist, and he will be working with Ms. Neubauer closely through March and April. There were no further comments or questions.

V. ADJOURNMENT

21.13

Commissioner O'Brien made a motion to adjourn.
Commissioner Hooper seconded.
Ms. Neubauer took a roll call vote:

Commissioner Dunwell – Yes
Commissioner O'Brien – Yes
Commissioner Stern – Yes

Commissioner Gallegos – Yes
Commissioner Vigil – Yes
Commissioner Hooper – Yes

Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Trevor M. Brennan

Trevor Brennan
Administrative Operations Specialist