



# Arizona Commission

for the deaf and the hard of hearing

100 N 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue □ Suite 104 □ Phoenix, AZ 85007  
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## Hard of Hearing Task Force Meeting Draft Minutes Virtual Meeting via Zoom August 16, 2024

I. **Call to Order, Introductions, Housekeeping** - (HOH Specialist, Christy Abrams)  
The Hard of Hearing Program Specialist called the meeting to order at 9:00 am

**Voting Members Present:** Commissioner Melanie O'Rourke, Liz Booth, Ron Tallman, Roz Seibold, Harvey Smith, Cynthia Amerman

**Voting Members Absent:** Commissioner Fred Williams

**ACDHH Staff Present:** Nikki Soukup, Director of Public Policy and Community Relations/  
Michele Michaels, Hearing Healthcare Program Manager / Rob Voreck, Community Services  
Program Manager / Christy Abrams, Hard of Hearing Specialist /Reena Banerjee, Community  
Engagement Coordinator / Eric Alvillar, Program Navigator

**Others Present:** CART Captioner and 2 ASL Interpreters

II. **Introducing New ACDHH Team member:**

- Rob Voreck, Community Services Program Manager

III. **Review & Approval of Minutes 02/23/2024**

- Roz Siebold moved to approve the minutes with noted correction from Ron Tallman and Ron Tallman seconded the motion.
- The correction is for page five under HLAA East Valley Kayla Beggen should be Kayla Beggen-Nunez

IV. **Public Policy & Community Relations Report (Nikki Soukup)**

- PPCEU the Public Policy and Community and Engagement Unit has been focused on the legislative session which ended on June 15th; testified and lobbied on several bills; including hearing aid insurance bill for children, older appropriations for older individuals who are blind which is part of a program with the Department of Economic Security (DES) and a statewide committee for vulnerable adults.
- Currently, there is a special education and graduation requirement. ACDHH advocated to waive these requirements that send kids out of school when they're not ready and they need more time in school for special education. That bill did not



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pass; Advocates of the bill are trying another route with the State Board of Education.

- Lobbied and testified on funding; ACDHH received the entire budget while other state agencies received cuts. ACDHH is completely 100% funded by the Telecommunications Fund for the Deaf which is a source of revenue from the landline phone tax. Eventually we would like to add another source of revenue.
- For the election 2024 we want to ensure that our communities are informed and that they have access to all the information that's out there about the election, the electoral process and the candidates.
- Partnered with the Citizens Clean Election Commission (CCEC); ensuring accessibility for all of their materials; voter education guide. Reena Banerjee was a big part of the ASL translation for the voter education guide and we made sure that the information is accessible with captioning.

#### Reena Banerjee:

- Worked with CCEC to make sure the information is accessible.
- Partnered with a variety of organizations to learn more about their goals and plans for the coming year; this information will help us to organize trainings, workshops and events.
- Worked with the American Red Cross and the Arizona Burn Foundation promoting smoke / fire alarms available for the Deaf and hard of hearing.
- Please let us know if you would like to promote any workshops; we have a form on our website so that we can get the information out to a wider audience.
- ACDHH will be providing Experience Our World (EOW) for medical professionals in Tucson which will provide various interactive stations that will provide a simulation of barriers that Deaf, Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind people experience every day.

#### V. **Hard of Hearing Specialist Report (Christy Abrams)**

- Christy acknowledged Barry Forst in absentia for all of the work he has done to support the hard of hearing community serving on the Hard of Hearing Task Force, Walk4Hearing and HLAA East Valley. He's volunteered countless hours and he is greatly appreciated. Ron shared Barry's spirits are very high; they are going to see the Diamondbacks play the Chargers. Liz also thanked Barry for all of his service. She's known him for many, many years and he's been such a wonderful participant, leader and mentor and we are going to miss him on the Task Force.



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- The HLAA 2024 National Convention was held in Phoenix, Arizona at the Sheraton Grand at the Wild Horse Pass June 26<sup>th</sup> through 29<sup>th</sup> and it was a great success. We congratulate Commissioner Melanie O'Rourke for receiving the National Spirit of HLAA award and Michele Michaels our Hearing Health Care Program Manager received the national Community Services award. A heartfelt congratulations to both. HLAA Conventions are fully accessible with assistive technology (loops) and captioning for every presentation.
- Christy shared that she had Cochlear Implant surgery in May and was activated in June; all is going well. She is working on rehab and her hearing is improving every day. Big thanks to all of the HOH Task Force members for sharing their own CI stories which empowered, encouraged her to become bimodal.
- The Hearing Healthcare Assistance Project in partnership with ASU / NAU and U of A is really busy. We just referred the 101st person. Thousands of people have been referred to other resources as well if they do not qualify for HHAP which is based on low income.
- ACDHH presentation requests are on the rise; Freedom Plaza Senior Living in Peoria, Yuma Regional Medical Center and coming up will be Americans with Disabilities Act National Network, Tucson Medical Center, Arts and Cultural Education and Community Engagement Group and Phoenix Indian Medical Center.

## VI. Hard of Hearing Program Manager Report (Michele Michaels)

- The Hard of Hearing Task Force has been meeting since 2007 and it's important to have your input on how we develop and manage our programs and services for the hard of hearing population in Arizona which is more than 1.3 million adults.
- Congratulated Christy on 5 years of service at ACDHH; 10,000 hours working in a field makes her a subject matter expert.
- Sherri Collins, our fearless visionary leader, has been with ACDHH for 26 years and she will be retiring in January. The job opening for this position, Executive Director will be posted. The ACDHH Commissioners will be choosing the new Executive Director.
- Sherri Collins spearheaded a special senior project and last March we had the first ever in the nation, Senior Expo for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind / CVHL Seniors.
- We are working with the Arizona's Alzheimer's Association (Desert Southwest) to form a support group for both Caregivers who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind or for people who are hearing and care for someone who is Deaf / HOH/ DeafBlind. Navigating healthcare is challenging and often, hearing people may not understand the assistive technology and communication access needs. We are thrilled that the Arizona's Alzheimer's Association approached us to partner with them on this. These sessions will be starting in October and will be virtual times to be TBD and confirmed.



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- Vicki Thompson from our Arizona Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program (AzTEDP) has a new title; she is now our Assistive Technology Specialist. People reach out to us for all kinds of Assistive technology; smartphone apps, speech devices, smoke alarms, baby cry signalers, carbon monoxide detectors. Vicki is learning about FM systems, infrared systems, loop systems, audio over Wi-Fi and Auracast. ACDHH provides various programs and services such as the Arizona relay service, free phone program, support service providers for DeafBlind, interpreter licensure, professional development for interpreters, Deaf services, DeafBlind services hard of hearing services and speech impaired to a degree. We will be putting out a new request for proposal (RFP) to look for a new relay provider for the next contract period. If there are things that you see with the Arizona Relay Service that you feel need to be changed, added or improved please reach out to Nikki our Director of Public Policy and Community Relations.
- Christy will be going to Phoenix Children's Hospital this Saturday; there is an event for families for children who have cochlear implants and also for families who are considering a cochlear implant for their child.
- If anybody out there wants training from us, they are free of charge and we provide ASL Interpreters and CART for those. Our training can be done virtually on Zoom or in person anywhere in the state. Some of the curriculums are; health care, public safety, Let's Get to Work for employers and we also have a new arts and culture training being developed.

## VII. ALOHA Leadership Announcements: (Cynthia Amerman)

- ALOHA celebrated their 40th anniversary on March 23rd and were grateful that Christy and Michele were both in attendance and spoke. Cynthia was sorry to miss the HLAA National Convention due to health challenges and not being able to fly and return to AZ on time.

## VIII. HLAA Chapter Leadership Announcements (Melanie O'Rourke / Ron Tallman)

HLAA West Valley: Melanie was sorry that she was not able to attend the HLAA National Convention in person. She enjoyed seeing all of the photos and information that came back from the convention. We were thrilled to watch the video Melanie made to accept her award for the national Spirit of HLAA and we all cheered her on. The HLAA West Valley Chapter is getting ready for their first meeting on October 8th at the First Presbyterian Church. They are looking at a couple of other venues that have the resources needed to



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hold accessible meetings. Their book club is on a short break and Commissioner Fred Williams will start this up again in September on the third Monday of the month 2:00-3:00

pm. For the first Chapter meeting in October various people will share their experience on attending the HLAA National Convention.

HLAA East Valley: Chapters have been on a summer break and the HLAA East Valley will start up on October 10th. This meeting will be similar to Hearing Other People's Experience (HOPE) meetings with an open dialogue. Individuals can talk about their experience of attending the HLAA convention. Through the year, they are looking at having; InnoCaption, Diamond Dogs, AzTEDP from ACDHH (Vicki Thompson) and an update on what's on the horizon for hearing aids for those people that are wearing them. Also taking a look at Auracast and closing out the season with changes coming for commuter travelers who have disabilities. The next HOPE meeting (these are virtual on Zoom) will begin October 24th.

## IX. AZ Walk4Hearing 2023:

- Arizona's Walk4Hearing will be held on Saturday, November 2nd 2024 at Riverview Park; registration will begin at 8:00 am and the stage presentations will happen at 9:30 am. There will be a few changes; Ron has a meeting with the City of Mesa to chart out a new course that will keep us within the confines of the Riverview Park and this will save money too. To date they have raised just over \$9,149.00 a really good number. For those of you who have been attending over the last nine years, that's \$5,000 ahead of previous walks.
- Ron also mentioned the final count for the HLAA National Convention in Phoenix was 510 people in attendance, that is over 100 more than they had in New Orleans the previous year. Also a big THANK YOU to Liz Booth who stuffed 500 bags for the convention!

## X. Employment Harvey Smith:

- Harvey shared the experience of being bimodal with CIs is interesting and wished Christy best of luck with that. He shared that there are a lot of career fairs going on; lots of opportunities for job seekers to get in contact with recruiters or hiring managers. The next career fair is September 25th. Feel free to reach out to Harvey with any questions.
- There is a slight slowdown in the number of job postings and in high-demand jobs. There are still plenty of opportunities for people to move up or to try something new;



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so don't feel stuck in the job you have. There are some layoffs and quite big ones. Our Space lost a contract and almost 500 people lost their jobs last month. They are seeing

some layoffs for the start of the winter. There are some interesting changes coming to the economy, but this can result in opportunity rather than dire situations. There's a lot of opportunity in the health care sector, behavioral health jobs, entry-level jobs all in high demand. Cynthia asked if there's any career fairs coming up in the Tucson area? Harvey responded all jobs and events are listed on the statewide website: [www.azjobconnection.gov](http://www.azjobconnection.gov)

## XI. Announcements / Share Information (All)

- Michele mentioned for everyone to keep in mind our next task for the HOH Task Force. The HOH Task Force has contributed to: our bright yellow buttons, "Please face me and speak slowly", Hard of Hearing communication water bottle stickers and magnets, wallet size card and driver's glove box card to help public safety officers gain insight in how to better communicate if they pull over a HOH driver. We'd like everyone to think about ideas for our next task. Also, if everyone could pop onto our website, we'd love feedback on that. What is your experience using it, ideas, thoughts, suggestions? That will be helpful information to have for our next meeting.
- Carmen Green Smith shared a good morning and thank you all so much and how much we appreciate all of you committing your time to support the Commission as a whole and services that support the hard of hearing community. The ACDHH board meeting was quite long last night but to a great end as it relates to improving our service for all the communities that we serve.
- Michele also gave a shout to Eric Alvillar, our Program Navigator. He is our gate keeper and the first person you see when you come to ACDHH. He is able to guide our communities to the best Specialist to serve them. Please feel free to use [info@ACDHH.az.gov](mailto:info@ACDHH.az.gov) to share any questions or reach out to Eric anytime.

## XII. Meeting Adjourned at am 10:44 am

**Next Meeting Date Friday, November 15, 2024 at 9:00 am**