

Please Note: This is not an approved copy of the minutes for the 6/21/23 meeting of the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

June 21, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

Commissioners Attending: *Caroline Obrecht, Rainer Randell, Betsy Beach, Bunmi Osho, Tim Riker*

Commissioners Not Attending: *Kimberly Marthers, David Mallowney*

Staff Attending: *Michelle Cline, Pam Zellner, Mike Baer, Holly St Pierre (on zoom)*

Public Attending: *Aimee Slezak, Heather Anderson, Alex Laferriere, Heather Niedbala*

Communication Accommodations: *Interpreters: Joan Wattman, Amy Corey, Kendra Timko-Hochkeppel
CART service: Tammi Burnham*

Location: *Cafeteria, RI School for the Deaf*

Caroline Obrecht, Temporary Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm. The roll call was conducted. The quorum was met with 5 commissioners in attendance. During the search Caroline Obrecht read RICDHH's Mission Statement, Vision, and Guiding Principles.

Review of the 5/17/23 Meeting Minutes: Betsy Beach made a motion to approve the 5/17/23 meeting minutes with a revised section containing the legislative summary. Bunmi Osho seconded the motion. The motion passed, five in favor (5-0-0).

Review of the 5/22/23 Meeting Minutes: Tim Riker made a motion to approve the 5/22/23 meeting minutes as written. Rainer Randall seconded the motion. The motion passed, five in favor, (5-0-0).

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:

- Michelle Cline, our new Executive Director, has been onboarding by attending various meetings in the last three weeks. She met with the Chair of the Board, the Vice Chair of the Board, the prior Interim Executive Director, and the RICDHH staff. She has also had interdepartmental meetings with RI Human Resources, RI Office of the Budget, and the RI Department of Health. Concerning the Healthcare Systems Transformation Project (HSTP), she met with Marie Lynch at RI College and made plans to meet soon with Christine West and Rick Brooks.

- Michelle Cline also started to meet with various stakeholders in the state, including the Deaf Senior Citizens group at their regular Tuesday night meeting. Her goal is to schedule individual meetings with many different stakeholder groups and to introduce herself as the new RICDHH Executive Director.
- Michelle Cline met with Maria Cimini, Director of the Office of Healthy Aging (OHA). She shared with Maria Cimini some of the concerns of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Senior Citizens in RI. RICDHH will partner with OHA in the future to address these issues.
- There was a recent legislators forum where Deaf Senior Citizens aired their concerns. Michelle Cline is working to make sure these seniors now get follow up appointments with key State Representatives and Senators.
- The US Department of Justice (US DOJ) has an agreement settlement because of a suit against the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) concerning the lack of adequate services for parents with disabilities. This is similar to a settlement case that Michelle Cline has been involved with in Massachusetts. Michelle will meet tomorrow with the attorney from the US DOJ. She wants to make sure that RICDHH is involved, and that communication, technological support, and resources are improved in the areas where people are affected by DCYF services.
- The Interpreter/CART referral service has been in process of an assessment. This has been completed at this point in-house. RICDHH has decided to change their scheduling platform from USKED to ERSP. There will be a soft launch first, for current interpreters who are working on the master price agreement and for some agencies that request interpreters often. The hope is that by August first the communication plan will be complete and that RICDHH will have completed the transition to ERSP.
- Michael Baer will be doing a presentation at the Rhode Island Preparedness Conference this Friday, June 23rd. He will speak about effective communication with people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing during emergencies and natural disasters.
- Michelle Cline talked about the priorities of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), including elderly affairs, dismantling racism, the well-being of youth, and equity in education. Tim Riker added that in Region One of NAD, Virginia through Maine, combatting climate change is also a priority.
- Michelle Cline also met recently with the National Association of State Agencies serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing People (NASADHH). Much of the discussion was about services for Senior Citizens. She learned there that the reauthorization of the IDEA and the Older Americans Act has to happen on the federal level. It is important that there are issues addressed in those acts that affect Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened people.
- An on-going issue for RICDHH is expanding the pool of interpreters and CART providers.
- There is also a need for training first responders, such as police officers, ambulance drivers, and firefighters. This training would bring together what we have learned about emergency management and the people who are providing front line services.
- Michelle Cline will prioritize designing a strategic plan for RICDHH that reflects what the community wants and needs. RI community input will be central.

- As the budget is passed, Michelle will start to meet key legislators and go into their offices at the State House. She can find out what their goals are and talk to them about our needs and try to bring those into alignment. RICDHH can work more closely with the State House in the legislative cycle for fiscal year 2024.

TEMPORARY CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT:

- Temporary Chairperson Caroline Obrecht met with Executive Director Cline and is pleased with all the on boarding that Michelle has done. They are off to a good working relationship and a good start.
- Commissioner David Mallowney recently had Achilles tendon surgery and is now doing physical therapy.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- The Education Committee will meet June 22nd at 4 pm in the RISD conference room.
- The Tech Access and Telecommunications Relay Services Committee is also meeting this month.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: UPDATES ABOUT INNIVEE STRATEGIES CONTRACT:

- Innivee Strategies provided a detailed breakdown of the additional costs they incurred during the Executive Director search. Tim Riker and Caroline Obrecht met with Shane Feldman and agreed that an additional \$2,500 fee for Innivee's work would be equitable. Tim Riker made a motion that the RICDHH board support the additional \$2,500 fee. Bunmi Osho seconded the motion. The motion passed, five in favor (5-0-0).

Temporary Chairperson Obrecht called a break at 7:02 pm. She called the meeting the meeting back to order at 7:13 pm.

NEW BUSINESS:

- There was discussion about planning a 30th Anniversary celebration and welcoming RICDHH's new Executive Director during Deaf Awareness month in September. Bunmi Osho and Holly St Pierre agreed to make calls to find a venue.
- The Board discussed developing a strategic plan for the new fiscal year and using as a starting point the priorities that were developed at a Board retreat several years ago. Notes from this retreat will be obtained from Shane Feldman and given to the Board to review before the July RICDHH meeting. Tim Riker and Betsy Beach spoke about possibly including a goal concerning climate change and climate resiliency in the strategic plan for RICDHH.
- Commissioner terms were reviewed. Outreach to a diverse group of applicants for Commissioner vacancies will be a needed priority.

- Michelle Cline will be scheduling meet and greet events, listening sessions, and roundtable meetings during the next several months. She foresees meeting with more nontraditional groupings such as Veterans. It was suggested that she could consider meeting with issue-based groups such as those focusing on housing, transportation access, or the environment.
- There were some updates from Tim Riker concerning accessibility at the State House and the General Assembly. The House side has finally documented all of their meetings, committee meetings, and agendas. Within those documented meetings and agendas, they have added an opportunity for those who need accommodations to act, and the person to contact for accessibility has been listed. The Senate has yet to take this step. There is also work to be done for improved access to RI candidates who are running for office at organized debates, at community events, etc.
- Michelle Cline stated that she recently served on the Massachusetts State House Accessibility Board. There has been a push in MA to establish a universal design that provides a standardized approach to CART, captioning, and how people are able to provide testimonials in government sessions.
- Tim Riker stated that prior to COVID, RICDHH did tend to coordinate the interpreters and schedule all of the deaf and sometimes disability related bills. However, committee meetings at the State House were often not posted in a timely manner. It was difficult to contact people to testify at the last minute. This system changed during COVID. During COVID one would need to type testimony into an email. The Committee Chairperson would then verbally read the emails to the committee. Tim felt that this procedure was very impersonal.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

- Amy Slezak suggested making more vlogs and educating the community about what the Commission is here for. Increasing RICDHH's visibility with youth and young adults is especially important and should be a priority.
- Heather Niedbala stated that RI RID is meeting this Saturday June 24th from 10 am to noon at Bridgemark in Warwick. This is a planning meeting and a lead in to a larger event at a future date focusing on airing community concerns.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Sojourner House is looking for a Case Manager to work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients. Sojourner House is an organization that deals with domestic violence in RI.
- Brown University is partnering with the University of Massachusetts Medical School to establish a group called Deaf Yes. Deaf Yes will be a center for empowerment and recovery. There will be a trial run this summer that uses the center's video with 80 healthcare providers.
- Juneteenth will now be recognized as a state holiday in RI.

Temporary Chairperson Obrecht adjourned the meeting at 8:07 pm.