



**State of Vermont**  
**Agency of Human Services**

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June 1, 2015

Senate Government Operations Committee  
State of Vermont  
Senate Chamber  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5201

Dear Senator White and Members of the Senate Government Operations Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to send us your thoughts and suggestions on the most crucial components of Senate bill 66. We appreciate the opportunity to work across the departments in the Agency of Human Services and with the Agency of Education to improve our system of care for children and adults who are Deaf/deaf or hard of hearing in Vermont.

The current Hearing Advisory Council has historically represented individuals from birth through 22 years of age from both a medical and an educational perspective. For many years, the Council had a representative from the Deaf community and we benefited greatly from that perspective. Over the last 5 years, our attempts to include a member who is Deaf have been unsuccessful although we have continued to try and recruit.

We welcome the opportunity to change the name, representation and structure of the Council to be more inclusive. Membership can and will be expanded to include the groups and individuals described in the letter from the Senate Government Operations Committee. For your information, our current membership includes:

- Vermont Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (VTEHDI) staff;
- Professional audiologists;
- the 9 East Network organization;
- staff from Children's Integrated Services (CIS) in the DCF Child Development Division;
- staff from the University of Vermont Deaf/Blind program;
- Adults who are hard of hearing;
- homebirth midwives; and
- Parents of children who are Deaf/deaf and/or hard of hearing.

In the past, this Council has been a volunteer group. In the absence of allocated funding, we will plan to move forward in that format but recognize that participation is difficult for some without compensation; we will do our best to accommodate and assist where we can.

It is crucial that all modalities have fair and unbiased representation on the Council. The needs of members of the Deaf community, including American Sign Language (ASL), are often different from the needs of the

population who are hard of hearing and of children and adults with cochlear implants. We are committed to ensuring that the Council represents all of these modalities equally.

Our vision for the expansion of the Council is to develop policies and systems that will continue to improve services for children and adults who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing, as well as to facilitate inclusive collaboration and communication. The expanded Council will advise the departments within the Agency of Human Services which work with Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families and advise the Agency of Education on their policies and systems for children who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing and their families. The Agency will also work collaboratively for the implementation of policies through the community agencies and partner state agencies that receive funding and deliver services to children and adults who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing.

Part of this work will include a survey of parents with children who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing and adults who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing, including questions about transition from early intervention to school based services.

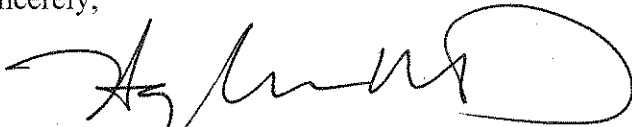
The Council should explore opportunities for children and adults who are Deaf/deaf and hard of hearing to socialize, including but not limited to enhancing the role of the Vermont Chapter of Hands and Voices.

While the newly expanded Council can set policy around interpreter services, we do not believe it should have a role in the oversight and monitoring of the qualifications of interpreters. We can plan to discuss that within the newly expanded Council and to offer some recommendations for how that might best be handled within the larger system of care.


The Council will need new governance, mission and vision, in addition to guiding principles and group norms. We are energized by the work in front of us and by the opportunity to expand the membership, mission and role of the Council.

We look forward to working collaboratively across agencies and with the Deaf /deaf and hard of hearing community to reconstitute the Council and begin this important work right away.

Sincerely,



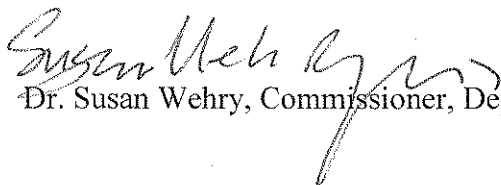
Dr. Harry Chen, Commissioner, Vermont Department of Health



Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary, Agency of Education



Ken Schatz, Commissioner, Department for Children and Families



Dr. Susan Wehry, Commissioner, Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living