



Department of  
**Human Services**

# Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing

2020 Annual Report

Tennessee Department of Human Services

Division of Rehabilitation Services

505 Deaderick Street, Nashville, TN 37243



The Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind & Hard of Hearing (TCDDDBHH) was created in 1978 by the Tennessee General Assembly. The applicable statute can be found at Tennessee Code Annotated 74-4-2102.

An ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 71, Chapter 4, Part 21, relative to the council for the deaf and hard of hearing was enacted by the Tennessee General Assembly and signed by Governor Bill Haslam on May 20, 2013. The act changed the name to the Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing (TCDDDBHH). The act also expanded the council to eighteen members. The Council is located within the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) and is a part of the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

### ***Our Mission***

The Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing exists to serve as an advocate for culturally appropriate services affecting Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing persons through coordination, public awareness, and consultation and education in areas of public service, health care, education, and employment.

### ***Responsibilities***

The Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing has the statutory responsibility to:

1. Advocate services affecting people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing in the areas of public services, healthcare, education, vocational training, employment, emergency services, resource sharing, and communication;
2. Act as a bureau of information for people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing to state agencies and public institutions providing health care, employment, vocational, educational services, resource sharing, and emergency services to the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing, and to local agencies and programs;

3. Collect facts and statistics and other special studies of conditions affecting the health and welfare of people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing in Tennessee;
4. Provide for a mutual exchange of ideas and information on the national, state, and local levels;
5. Encourage and assist local governments and agencies in the development of programs for people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing;
6. Cooperate with public and private agencies and units of local, state, and federal governments in promoting coordination in programs for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing;
7. Authorize the Executive Director to prepare an annual report and needs assessment to the Council that reviews the status of state services for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing. The Council shall submit the approved report and the needs assessment to the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Speaker of the House of Representatives and make this report available to organizations serving the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing; and
8. Make recommendations for needed improvements and to serve as an advisory body in regard to new legislation affecting the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing.

## July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020 Report

### ***Major Activities***

The Council was involved in a number of activities during the last fiscal year.

Activities included:

- Hired a new Executive Director for the Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing. The new Executive Director, Lisa Rimmell, joined the Council in February 2020.
- Provided extensive self-advocacy training across the State to assist individuals in developing strategies to address communication issues related to accessing services offered by businesses, community agencies, state agencies and medical

providers. Included in these trainings was information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and how to determine whether Video Remote Interpreting Services are an appropriate fit to provide effective communication. TCDDDBHH is continuing this work with the six (6) community centers to provide even more educational workshops focused on understanding and learning how to choose between on-site interpreters and video remote interpreting at local hospitals.

- Established a Mental Health Task Force to address the needs of people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing and trying to access mental health and substance abuse assistance. The task force involved Council Members, representatives from the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing communities, sign language interpreters, and mental health and substance abuse treatment providers. The Mental Health Task Force developed goals and action steps to be addressed throughout the next year.
- The Council members met with Memphis community members to listen and address concerns regarding service delivery in the Memphis area. As a result, the Tennessee Department of Human Services contracted with BridgesWEST to establish a new Communication Center in Memphis. BridgesWEST opened in September 2019. Several Council members attended the Grand Opening Celebration to meet with the members of the Memphis Deaf community and provide information about TCDDDBHH.
- Facilitated community discussions to learn concerns and gather feedback from Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing consumers on how to improve statewide services. Information was reported back to Council members and community centers on their behalf. Support was provided to community centers to provide Technology and Deaf Culture workshops.
- Provided information for Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing people by hosting a booth at various community events and conferences on behalf of the Tennessee Department of Human Services and TCDDDBHH. During the pandemic, the Council was represented at a variety of virtual events.
- A Deaf-Blind Task Force sub-committee continues to develop policy and assist grantees with incentives, hiring, and training for Support Service Providers (SSP), to increase access for Deaf-Blind consumers. As a result, one grantee was able

to provide SSP services to people who are Deaf-Blind through a voucher system. TCDDDBHH is continually working with community centers to develop SSP programs (also known as sighted guides) for people who are Deaf-Blind and require these services. TCDDDBHH is assisting community centers in the training and hiring of SSPs for Deaf-Blind consumers. Workshops to train SSPs were provided in Middle and East Tennessee at the centers. Continued assistance will be given to the centers in order to increase the SSP services across the state.

- A Task Force sub-committee continued to develop strategies to improve the relationship between law enforcement and Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing communities by hosting training workshops on communication access. The Community Centers continued to distribute visor cards for drivers. TCDDDBHH solicited feedback about the law passed last year called the *Deaf and Hard of Hearing Driver Safety Act*. The law established the use of the Vehicle Title and Registration System database system which allows law enforcement agencies access to information identifying drivers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing during a traffic stop. Although there were some concerns expressed by members of the Deaf community, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.
- The Executive Director developed the following workshops for staff training at the Community Centers and Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers: Self Advocacy 101; TCDDDBHH Explained: Understanding the Council and the Work We Do; Basic Sensory Information; and Self Advocacy for Youth. Some workshops have been delivered in person, and some were provided virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- TCDDDBHH reviewed ways to improve the level of certification and training of sign language interpreters in Tennessee. More qualified professional sign language interpreters, deaf interpreters, and tactile interpreters for the Deaf-Blind will be needed to serve persons who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing. TCDDDBHH continued to facilitate a work group to establish credentials for interpreter licensure in Tennessee. A draft was created, and meetings were held across the state to gather feedback regarding licensure from sign language interpreters and the Deaf community. The work group recommended licensure,

which would require interpreters to meet established requirements to obtain a license in order to practice in Tennessee.

- Tornadoes that destroyed parts of Middle Tennessee in March and Chattanooga in April led TCDDDBHH to utilize contacts at the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency to ensure equal access to information for those who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing. As a result, television stations around the state provided sign language interpreters for all updates. Advocacy efforts were successful in convincing the television stations to maintain visibility of the interpreter onscreen throughout the updates and provide quality closed captioning services for these updates. One of the grantees instituted a phone tree system to check on Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing individuals' safety.
- The Executive Director of TCDDDBHH supported the grantees in seeking opportunities for outreach and advocacy throughout the pandemic. At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, each grantee was contacted about initiating advocacy efforts to ensure that all updates about Coronavirus were made accessible through both sign language interpreters and closed captioning. Captioning for live events is often full of errors, and television stations often forget to show the interpreter when they cut away to graphics. Due to the requests and feedback from the Deaf community and the advocacy efforts of the grantees, significant improvements have been made in live broadcast accessibility. For the first time, updates are being broadcast consistently in Upper East Tennessee with a sign language interpreter. All efforts, progress and results were reported to TCDDDBHH during quarterly meetings as well as during weekly newsletter updates.
- As a part of their grant agreement with TCDDDBHH, all Centers have continued to provide services in a virtual manner. For example, Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Johnson City has negotiated with Frontier Health to keep the Center open to the public two days per week to allow customers to utilize the video phones. In rural areas, many of the Deaf customers do not have access to internet or to a video phone unless they can come to the Center.

- TCDDDBHH continued to meet virtually throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Researching and selecting an appropriate platform was a monumental achievement. All virtual meetings had 40+ attendees including statewide community members, resulting in record attendance due to the virtual platform.

## ***Community Centers for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing***

The Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services provides funding in performance-based contracts facilitated by independent agencies. The contracts are awarded to the following grantees: Community Centers for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing in Johnson City, Knoxville Center of the Deaf, Partnership in Chattanooga, Bridges TN in Nashville, Jackson Center for Independent Living, and BridgesWEST in Memphis.

Contact information for these agencies can be found on the TCDDDBHH website: <https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/councils-and-committees/tcddbhh.html>.

These grantees report progress, outcomes, statistical data, initiatives and events to the Council during quarterly meetings and submit their statistical data to the Executive Director of TCDDDBHH who compiles the information for the Division. The Division provides funding in performance based contracts for the six (6) regional community centers to provide:

- Outreach
- Pro Bono Sign Language Interpreting Services
- Client Advocacy
- Hosting Educational Workshops and Interpreter Training Workshops
- Activities, Events, and Social Media Participation

The chart below displays statistics which demonstrate the utilization of the wide array of services provided by the six grantees' partnerships with TCDDDBHH:

<b>Performance Based Services</b>	<b>Performance Metrics</b>
Outreach and Referral	666 Contacts
American Sign Language Interpreting Services (Pro Bono)	2353 Pro Bono Interpreting Hours
Client Advocacy for Deaf, DeafBlind, & Hard of Hearing	1108 Individuals
Educational Workshops and Training	491 Hours
Activities, Events and Social Media Participation	617 events, activities and social media activity



***Membership:***

Members are appointed to the Council by the Governor and serve voluntarily without compensation. Most seats on the Council are mandated by statute. The members of the Council during the reporting period were:

<b>MEMBER NAME</b>	<b>ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION</b>
Dr. Vicki Kirk	Tennessee Department of Education – Tennessee School for the Deaf
Tiffany Kelley	Tennessee Department of Human Services
Sean Goad	Tennessee Department of Health
Alex King	Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services



James Smith	Deaf Consumer Representative
Phil Yater	Hard of Hearing Consumer Representative
Eric Fleet	Deaf Consumer Representative
James Moore	Hard of Hearing Consumer Representative
Lori Wyke	Deaf-Blind Consumer Representative
Louvisia Conley	Minority Consumer Representative
Kodi Ogle	Tennessee Hands and Voices
Monique Brazelton	Tennessee Public Utility Commission
Patrick Sheehan	Tennessee Emergency Management Agency
Dana Hughes	Tennessee Association of the Deaf
Rebecca Walls	Hearing Loss Association of America
Megan Potts	Tennessee Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
Mandy Johnson	Tennessee Department of Human Services
Robin Beamon	Tennessee Department of Safety & Homeland Security

***TCDDDBHH Statewide Goal Plans:***

- Currently, there are no facilities that provide mental and behavioral health services specifically to the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing communities. The Mental Health Task Force formed through TCDDDBHH has established goals and an action plan to address this issue, but there is much work to be done. Strategies have been discussed, and a survey has been developed to obtain more specific input from these communities. A series of community meetings will be held throughout the next year to gauge the need of the community and collect feedback from customers.
- Mental Health Interpreting Services with People who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing: The Centers have a few interpreters who have completed mental health interpreting training. TCDDDBHH plans to continue to provide training on how to utilize interpreters to use a practical approach to mental health services with the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing mental health patients.

- The Council is supporting the endeavors of the Tennessee Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and members of the community to develop a proposal for state licensure for American Sign Language Interpreters. The goal for this proposal is to be written and submitted to legislature in 2021 by the Tennessee Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. If passed, it will allow for more qualified professional sign language interpreters, deaf interpreters, and tactile interpreters to serve persons who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing.
- TCDDDBHH plans to continue the work previously established to improve emergency services impacting the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing communities. The goal is to provide education to the Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing communities statewide on emergency preparedness. Alliances have formed with the National Weather Bureau, Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, Tennessee Association of the Deaf, Tennessee chapters of the Hearing Loss Association of America, and several organizations for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing. Over the next year, TCDDDBHH plans to implement at least one emergency preparedness training in each area of the state.
- TCDDDBHH is continuing to support two of the six grantees: Bridges for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Nashville and Knoxville Center of the Deaf, to improve community services in the Cookeville/Crossville area. The Council's goal is to improve services and reduce wait time for interpreters to arrive at hospitals, emergency rooms, courtrooms, and police stations. Additionally, the collaboration between the two centers will strengthen services such as job placement, social work, advocacy, educational workshops, and assistive technology training for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing community in Cookeville/Crossville area.
- TCDDDBHH will continue to strengthen the partnership with the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security, the Tennessee Highway Patrol, and weigh stations staff to acknowledge the legitimacy of Deaf and Hard of Hearing truckers. TCDDDBHH will monitor the regulations set forth by the Tennessee Department of Transportation over the next year.
- TCDDDBHH will continue to support attendance at conferences related to Technology Accessibility for Emergency Message Alerts, Video Remote

Interpreting, Interpreting Services, Rehabilitation Services, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Programs, and Accessibility at the workplace for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing.

- TCDDDBHH is continuing to develop a professional network system that is focused on interactions and relationships of businesses and government services for the benefit of Vocational Rehabilitation and Community Center customers that are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing.

Reported and Submitted by Lisa Rimmell, TCDDDBHH Executive Director

TCDDDBHH Website:

<https://www.tn.gov/humanservices/ds/councils-and-committees/tcddbhh.html>