

D&HHS

20250809-1330 Town Hall Meeting

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[Waiting for meeting to start]

>> DEB ATWOOD: We are waiting for Mickey. We can wait for the other board members and get started. Ellen then

>> ELLEN Z: Then whenever you are ready.

>> CHARIS AUSTIN: Good afternoon everyone. I am Charis Austin, I'm the secretary of the board of the deaf and hard of hearing services.

First I want to welcome everyone here today. We are looking forward to hearing your ideas. Thank you D&HHS staff for helping to make this happen.

The next item on the agenda is Housekeeping:

Before we begin, I would like to make some housekeeping comments. If you have not already done so, please sign in just outside the door. This is for safety reasons and for any follow-up contact that may be needed. The restrooms are outside the door and to the right, go through the double doors and they are on the left. The men's restroom is first then the women's.

I also want to remind everyone that this room is looped.

The agenda is as follows:

1. The board members who are here will introduce themselves.
2. There will be introductory remarks about the board makeup.
3. Before the floor is open for comments or questions, we will give instructions on the procedure for presenting comments or questions.

So the first thing is the Introduction of Board Members

After I review the makeup of the board I want everyone to introduce themselves.

Currently we have 6 members on our board and are in the process of interviewing two candidates to join the board. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing services board is made up of 1 Deaf person, 2 CODAS, two hard of hearing with one of them being totally blind and the other visually impaired, and one parent of a Deaf child. We are in the process of interviewing someone who is Deaf and someone who is DeafBlind. We are also looking for some other members who have backgrounds in accounting and non-profit law. Once we have brought on board the new executive director, we will turn our full energy into cultivating opportunities for communication with the Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing communities. Right now, we are investing all our energy and funds into the executive director search.

And at this point I will let the other board members introduce themselves.

>> I'm president of deaf and hard of hearing services. And I am not a lawyer, not admitted to the bar but expertise in nonprofit administration and social.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Hello, my name is Tyler Smeltekop, this is my sign name. I'm the vice president of our board. I was born deaf. Raised using the oral method in a mainstream classroom. And then college I started to learn American Sign Language, sort of used it on-and-off. But last April I became fully deaf, losing my residual hearing. And now I use sign language full time. I'm excited to serve on our board. And I want to see the best outcomes. For the deaf and hard of hearing and deaf blind children in the west side of Michigan. And also all over Michigan.

>> MICKEY C: I'm a CODA and that is my mother sitting right there. Bonnie. So I'm probably the longest tenured board member. I want to start my introduction with just a quick story. When I joined the board in 2015, this agency was about one week from shutting its doors. There was no fiscal foundation. And there were significant changes that needed to be made. During that time we've had several changes in board members and board leadership. But one main stay has been there. So I know there will be comments today that are very, very emotionally charged. It's important for us to stay to the facts in our conversations. I want everybody to remember that this agency was not in good standing financially for many years. But with that being said I'm happy to be here. The purpose is to hear from the community and we will do that. Thank you.

>> ELLEN Z: Hello, my name is Ellen Z. I'm the parent of a deaf son and a community son has cochlear implants and hearing aids. We are working on slowly learning ASL so we can enter the community with the confidence. During the day I'm the Executive Director at the Michigan institute for education and one area of interest is where we have a legal presentation, in particular we did a mock trial for takeaways for people who are seeking additional hour certification in law and use the programs as an area to collaborate and generally collaborate in everything. And thank you for being here. And hopefully we will decide to join us up here.

>> DEB ATWOOD: My name is Deb Atwood the Executive Director I've been with the agency since 2006 I became Executive Director 2015 I believe. And January will be 20 years, it is time for me to retire and excited to see who will come next to lead this agency on to where it can be to help it grow. Expand and service more of deaf, deaf blind and hard of hearing within the State of Michigan. Thank you for being here today. And with that I will have Charis give the roadmap of the day.

>> CHARIS AUSTIN: Okay, as we open the floor up for comments, we ask everyone to respect all viewpoints and be respectful of others when making comments. We want to know what you like about D&HHS and what you would like to see different. We may not be able to answer questions today but we are taking notes and will use the information we gain in future planning.

To ensure that everyone has a chance to make a comment, each speaker will have 3 minutes to make their remarks. A 30 second warning will be given before the 3 minutes

are up.

To facilitate interpreter communication, we ask that each speaker come to the front of the room to make their comments. When making comments, please identify yourself. This will help interpreters and members who are blind and visually impaired know who is speaking.

Finally, we ask that the interpreters let us know when an interpreter change is needed. At this time I am turning the meeting over to Tyler who will facilitate the discussion.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: All right, this is Tyler, I'm happy to facilitate. All right, I'm glad to be here, welcome you all, I'm happy you are here, anyone want to volunteer to start us off with the first comment? Go ahead and come on up here when you are ready. Come on up. .

>> Hi my name is Roy. And I done really have a comment but more questions about the Executive Director search so if you can just tell us more about that, who you are working with, how the process is going. .

>> We are working with -- what, we are working with strategies and we have held with them a community meeting earlier in July. And they have helped both groups the board and staff and also members of the community. And they developed what we want with the community and staff report, the Executive Director. And with that they developed a prospectus and at this time they are in the process of getting that in writing and we will be posting it this coming week or the following week and that will open up the search. And with that it will be a four to six week period where people can apply. Oh, and let me back up. There is also a video that will be out explaining the search. The application process. And we will be doing that this week too or next week and that will go along with the prospectus which tells what we want in an Executive Director. What the agency is like. And who we serve. And also talk about the Grand Rapids area and West Michigan in 27 counties that we serve. And that is where it stands right now.

>> MICKEY C: One point of clarity, I want to explain how we get here. We did as a board form an internal committee initially to find candidates and go through that process. That was not successful for multiple reasons. And the strategies have to improve the track record of bringing in strong leaders. Into organizations like ours. So that is how we landed there. Thank you. .

>> I'm going to add more to that, and it is a deaf organization. So they are very familiar with deaf culture. So they are put agree lot of talent and know how to the search process. And that is it, Tyler?

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Yes, I wanted to add I'm sorry now is an important time for DHHS while we are doing the search. I'm sorry? Everything okay?

>> I just didn't know who was talking.

>> I'm sorry Tyler is speaking. Tyler is speaking. This is Tyler speaking. It's an important time you know with this search finding candidates who have lived experience or, you know, a person, who maybe is a parent of a child with hearing loss and so on.

So during this search it's going to be difficult. To find the right person who has the motivation, the time, the savvy to be able to come and join us. As Executive Director. So we need people more than ever before. Oh,.

>> Invite the next person to come up and speak, oh, yeah, okay anybody else who is ready to -- if you are ready to go ahead and lead us in the next round of comments, sorry, any other comments or questions, please go ahead and come to the front. .

>> Okay this is JJ. My full name is Jeannette but I prefer JJ. So I have a question for the board I'm curious about your provision for this agency and Executive Director search. You said you were for this agency can you tell us more about what the visions are for the agency?

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: I can add some comments. First, the board really wants to have a board. We want to have a nine member board, not six. So we want to add additional members to have a full board. That is our first goal. At the same time we know that this search for a new Executive Director is another goal. And that means we want to have a stable foundation for future. We want to have a strong leader. An understanding of the needs of our community. And whether that person again has lived experience as a deaf, deaf blind or hard of hearing individual or has a deaf child, someone who can bring diverse perspective to our board, I think that is important for us to have. And it will keep us focused toward our future goals, towards that strong foundation and that strong leadership.

Okay, this is Tyler. Does anyone else want to add to that? Okay, we have another comment. .

>> Can everybody see me clearly? I suggest that Nancy stand on the platform so people can see her signing, please, so she can see. Very good.

>> Okay.

>> DEB ATWOOD: The microphone has to be next to your mouth.

>> Okay, so my name is Nancy Gingerly. I live within the deaf community and we talked about our goal of having nine members on the board. I would like to see a fully deaf, inclusive community. Out and about. A social community. This is a place where deaf and hard of hearing people can come and share their experiences. And it's really important that everybody can communicate. So currently we don't see that. So my recommendation is that from now on I would like to see 12 members on the board instead. We would like to see us have nine to have 12 members on the board and we would like to see a minimum of four additional deaf people on the board. I understand we have CODAS on the board and other members but I really want that to be considered as well.

>> MICKEY C: Okay, thank you, Nancy. I appreciate the passion and energy around that. It has been a very long time since we have had nine board members. Now, we are more than happy to bring board members on that can help. We also understand that we've had board members leave. We've had multiple board members participate

and then leave for whatever reasons. So we listen to you. Understand that your ask and your request is for larger deaf representation. We can appreciate that. Now, this is my ask of the community. Please socialize that and submit more candidates. Right now we do struggle getting enough candidates that want to serve. But thank you for that.

This is Tyler, next question, please. Here we go. Come on up. .

>> Hi my name is Tom McGee. You want me to stand up here? I know that there are many agencies that serve the deaf and hard of hearing community. So we are looking for support, advocacy, services, the full spectrum. And I'm not seeing that from D&HHS. Do you plan on offering that in the future? Or maybe you could take some notes from other agencies, what programs they offer. And get some advice from them, okay? Thank you.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler, thank you for that comment. We do know about a lot of different services that the deaf, deaf blind and hard of hearing community need like mental health services, physical health, audiological, interpreter and deaf and tactile. The list is endless. We want to find a way to give or offer those services to satisfy those needs. That is one of our goals. I've served on the board for two years now. And I think there should be a way to add some more options for what we need. While at the same time having more board members involved, more stories, more obviously we need another Executive Director that is motivated. And passionate. And wants to add those services too. So I feel like at that point we would have a better relationship with the community. At large. I don't live in Grand Rapids. I live closer to the Lansing area. But I found D&HHS through their events. I was new learning sign language. And hold on.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Erica is coming, there is a problem with the microphone.
[Microphone is screeching]

.

>> Here you go. You can use that mic now for Tyler. Test, test. .

>> Thank you, okay.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: All right, this is Tyler speaking. I want to say a hearing people problem, okay.

All right, yes, we are all set. Looks like everything is working. Okay, so my point in all of that is I don't live in the area. I'm not from Grand Rapids. But I care about what happens here in Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids is a big community. And what happens here makes a difference on what happens in other areas around the state. I know that if we continue to improve D&HHS accessibility services for the community of Grand Rapids, that that will also help different communities, different areas in Michigan as well.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Can I add something to that, please? Hi, this is Deb speaking. I want to respond to that that unfortunately there aren't many agencies that serve the deaf, deaf blind and hard of hearing in Michigan. You have deaf can and us here, there

are a couple smaller ones in between but other than deaf can no one really offers as many services as we do. Where the problem lies is because we have so many deaf that we are serving with so many different things that need to be addressed within their lives that sometimes we just don't have enough time, our wheel house is just not there. Our staff works as hard as it can to do what we can for those that come in with different issues. We've looked at possibly taking some dollars from other programs and moving it into other programs to see where we can go. But also those programs are just as important, we feel, to the people in West Michigan. So adding additional programs, I think would be great, expanding on what we have, I think that is a wonderful idea but with the budget we are currently carrying I just don't see it happening. So what we need is additional fundraising. What we need are more dollars coming in. And that is where we really need the help from the community. Excuse me throughout West Michigan. Even though we serve 27 counties, a lot of them are rural, a lot of them are smaller. We are nothing compared to the east side of the state. So we really have to fight for every dollar that we can get. Thank you.

>> ELLEN Z: This is Ellen speaking. And that is something worthy to echo and amplify as broadly as possible. I would imagine and we haven't necessarily talked about this yet. But the needs are going to increase in the near future as more state and Federal services and funding does not trickle down. And so please, if there are resources, networks that you have or know that would be interested in a financial piece, worried about just sustainability with the goal in the near future. So the time pressure is real. And there will be more services cut, which will hurt more. But that falls on us to act more and that is everyone us in the room. That is anybody we know that we can bring into the networks.

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: And I want to add to that. This is Gail speaking. And what I'm hearing and one thing it takes money to make money. And to be able to have those fundraisers we need money, money to put on those fundraisers and to grow our services we need money. So it's a vicious cycle and a balancing act like Deb was saying taking funds from some funds, not all of them, one program to another then that program is a fund stopper. So that is why we need all the help we can get. And now for our next question.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler, do you have a question or a comment, go ahead, it's your turn.

>> Thanks. Hi, I'm Cindy, I live in Holland. I have picked on Deb and Erica for lots of years. I really appreciate the communication, the ease of accessing resources through deaf and hard of hearing services and have taken some classes. I wish they stuck better than they did. That is my doing. I work in healthcare. And I have worked in Grand Rapids for 30 years. So I know some of the challenges when people encounter healthcare services that don't communicate well with staff. I experienced that myself. I've been hard of hearing since I was three or four years old. And in those days we

didn't do child hearing screens so it was a matter of toughing it out. I appreciate the advocacy that D&HHS does. I think I have some brilliant ideas for D&HHS and we have tried a few over the years. And, again, it's a lot of it is money. And networks. I am a bit appalled that audiologists don't connect better and offer like financial support. That baffles me a bit. I appreciate the resources and helpfulness. We tried to do some stuff in Holland in collaboration with D&HHS and I really appreciate your partnership with that. That was a big lesson in how hard this is. Wow. And I get to see evidence of kids camp and the importance of network for people to reach out and connect when they have basic information. That is something I wish I could actually help with some more. But I know Deb has talked to me about stepping up a bit more and I might be able to do that some day.

More questions about the Executive Director thing. Is this -- are we posting for a full time position?

[Nodding head]

And I have no idea, are there a lot of potential candidates? Or is this going to be a really difficult search? If somebody can give me kind of the lay of the land on that, that would be great. But I mostly want to tell you how much I appreciate D&HHS and the programs that they offered. You're a lifeline. And I really want you to know how important that is so thank you. And if you can minimize how much you tap the microphone that would be great.

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: I did not realize I was doing that. I'm so sorry. As far as we have -- okay, as Mickey said we tried locally and didn't get a good enough candidacy pool. So and we have not opened it up to the public yet. So there have been some that trickle in. Maybe three or four. But it is not formerly opened yet so I don't -- it's going to be nationwide. We can go from there.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Mickey.

>> MICKEY C: Thank you for the compliments. The agency really strapped for staffing does try their best, tries to stay in their lane. I know there is some dissatisfaction on different lanes but it's possible and thank you for that.

The next piece is that was probably the number one challenging question I had for the strategies was I am challenging them to get strong candidates and a larger pool to choose from because that is a concern of mine. It's from a full time role, I would say the stress level and the pressure from both external, internal, managing people, managing, working with the community, working with the healthcare system as you are fully aware of. All that while trying to stay within budget is a challenge. So that was the number one question I asked of in the strategies was what does that pool look like? They have had proven success. That is to be determined. So we will see what happens. But thank you and thank you for the compliments.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler speaking, yes, you are next. Go right ahead. .

>> Hello, my name is.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Are you going to sign? If you are signing you need to stand up there, please.

>> Sorry.

>> Okay, can you see me now? Are we ready? Okay, my name is Amy. Marcus. And I've lived here all my life here in Grand Rapids. There is a long history of being in and out of D&HHS since 94 until now. I've been sitting here listening to what is being said. And all the different perspectives. One reason that I'm here, myself, is to show me, Amy Marcus, and saying that I'm a person who wants to apply to be on your board for that position. And I did e-mail Charis, I'm not sure I'm spelling her name right, Charis. I did e-mail her and I did let her know I was interested in this position. And I have not heard back. And so I came here as a person saying hello, I'm here and I'm interested in this position, okay? So you see my face. You see me here and my name is Amy, hello, so, yes. And secondly, as I'm looking and watching, I feel a little conflicted. I feel things are not clear on what you're looking for. And the board members. And the Executive Director. You know, if they are deaf, deaf blind, a hearing person, you know, what is that supposed to look like? My perspective is this is nationwide, okay. And then those people may be very ASL or the big D deaf, right? And they come here and it will be a culture shock for them. Because we are primarily oral communities, sorry to say but it's true. So that would be another challenge because you know, this is a nationwide search, we are looking at the deaf and RIT, see sun and sending out to all these places and they are ASL dominant environments so coming here they might want to turn down the job because we have a lot of you know oral people here. We had a lot of people turning it down for that. I mean, those people need to be serviced but we want to make sure that, you know, there will be inclusive. You know, or not. You know, are we just ordering about, listening and speaking or we on ASL or you know, so that is something that needs to be decided before we, you know, announce it because we don't want the confusion going on while we are waiting. Because it seems like we are just not there yet, right? We are not there yet. We haven't decided what we wanted for that. So I'm a little confused myself. And you know, is that list of what you are looking for very clear and do we have that cautionary statement on there to let them know this is primarily ASL place and we don't want them to come and say it's oral.

>> DEB ATWOOD: 30 seconds.

>> Okay.

>> I have 30 seconds? Sorry, I do have a lot of say. I have a lot of ideas obviously. And I just want to be involved in the situation. Whatever and please just contact me, please and thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

>> MICKEY C: Thank you, Amy. I'm going to wait until she sits down. Okay, thank you, Amy. So I'm going to address the difference in community here from an oral

versus ASL. So that was also one I was very, very out spoken with Shane at strategies. And I explained exactly what you said. I explained the difference in the community here on how it's heavily oral. And told them communication, all of that was shared. And the reason I shared that is because I know that. I grew up on the east side of the state in Saginaw. And spent time at TCAV try city association of the deaf. We know the east side of the state is very ASL first. And I explained that to Shane and made it very, very clear that we need to have the candidate that understands the community they are coming to. Now, when you said what are we looking for in a candidate? Earlier in the meeting Gail explained that we have been working with N and V to finalize what that posting looks like. Within that posting we will have the various points that you're asking about. So that is coming very, very soon. When that will be published. But very solid points as a board. We appreciate the interest. And we will make sure that we reply back here in a timely fashion so thank you for the time, Amy.

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: Okay, I'd like to make some comments.

>> CHARIS AUSTIN: .

>> Turn on the microphone.

>> CHARIS AUSTIN: Is it on?

>> No, I shut it off, sorry. .

>> Gail, do you want to help?

>> There you go.

>> CHARIS AUSTIN: Okay if there is a place for contact information on the sign up sheet I will get back to you.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler speaking.

>> What sign up sheet?

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Okay, Tyler speaking, there is a table in the back but the sliding backdoor and Mickey is on his way out there to show you guys where it's at. Okay, and I just wanted to add first of all thank you, Amy, for explaining the situation and expressing your interest in joining the board. That is exactly what I was hoping for. And wanting to see more of. Of, you know, people that are motivated and wanting to be a part and join the board.

Also the willingness to say what comes to mind and to share your experiences. That is exactly what we need. And as far as board members and what we are supposed to be doing and those activities, the board members like the job posting and the description and expectations and responsibilities of that role, I do believe that is posted on our website. It should be one of the first pages that you see on the website. So hopefully that will help with some of the questions that you have about the responsibilities of a board member and what they do. Yes. Did we have a comment over here? All right he is next. .

>> Can you see me here? All right, okay.

Hello everyone. You guys know I am Louifis. I've been deaf blind a few years ago became a deaf blind individual. And I'm listening to what everybody was saying, JJ, Amy and Roland. And I have been thinking. And I think there are two very important things that we need to focus on even though I know there are other priorities. If we can focus more on the technology. And making sure communication is smooth. You know, with the phone calls and text and things. I'm just wondering what is going on with that. I think that would help Grand Rapids. And become more effective. So I'm curious about your view points on that.

Secondly, you were talking about ASL and oralism and I think it's important to add tactile ASL as well. Do not ignore the deaf blind community as well. Keep that in mind. That is oral, ASL and tactile as well. So I'm really curious view points on technology so thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler speaking. Sure, I will wait. All right. This is Tyler speaking. I wanted to address your comment about including tactile and protactile as well. They are two different languages but they are equally just as important as the others. And it's something I recently learned about. That there is a difference with the protactile. It's an additional environmental awareness of what is happening in the room. As well as tactile. To have that communication access and sometimes you are doing both of them at the same time. So there is a need. So that is a specific professional communication access. And that is something that we are keeping in the back of our mind at all times. And I want to make sure all of our board members and staff, you know, remember these things and in all of our activities. And I think that is one way that the board can show, you know, that we are vested, need to invest in that part of the community. You know, not all organizations and agencies understand that demographic. And their access needs when it comes to communication. And so thank you. For addressing that. And I'm really happy that you did and I'm glad that viewpoint was added into the conversation today. And I hope it continues to be in future conversations. Our deaf blind people are a part of our community and our population. And I don't want them to be ignored or feel ignored. And that is something that I'm learning as a board member. And I'm in complete support of that community. And all of our community members. So thank you again for addressing that.

Also, you had mentioned communication. The last town hall that we had, oh, it was about a month or so ago, it was July I believe, that meeting communication issues were also addressed. And at one point that was brought up is everybody does not have the same technical skills. Some folks may not know how to use e-mail but they have a phone and would need text messaging. And so that is one part. You know, that I'm thinking is specific to the deaf community. And what they need in supports as well. And our board is working on making sure we are improving communication, letting people know information early enough and making sure they know enough information so we

are working on improving that as well. And hopefully we are all, you know, motivated. And you know, making sure we are just responding to you and saying, hey, you know, I'm glad that you are here. And letting you know there is an event coming soon. And so we need you know to be supportive as well and those communication barriers is a big part of it. And it's a big part of the deaf, deaf blind experience. And we know that we need that in the community as well.

I'm sorry, the next person over here? You will go first and then you, okay? So you are first, yes. I feel like I'm a teacher over here, pointing who is next.

[Laughter]

>> My name is Deb and I'm from the community. And ASL. Is this okay? Is this okay? Okay, I'm Deb Bockley and I'm from the oral program. And I know ASL also. And I've been with the deaf community and learned a lot from the deaf community. For everything I have learned today is very interesting, but I have one still my question if you can define for me you spoke about a town hall meeting in July. Can you refresh my memory? I don't remember any town hall meeting in July.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler speaking. We are going to wait until she has a chance to sit back down. Okay, sorry for causing any confusion. When I referred to the first town hall meeting that we had. The meeting we had here before was for friends of deaf and hard of hearing services. But I'm referring to the meeting that happened even before that one. So I wanted to clarify that. I just pulled up my schedule to look at that. But sorry for the confusion. .

>> I think it was in June. Yeah, that was in June. JJ speaking.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Oh, this is Tyler, June, right, yes, yep. So that one was in June and July is when we hosted the friends of D&HHS community. Sorry about that.

Okay, all set? Next? We are going to go over to you. If you want to come up. .

>> Hi, my name is Lori Andrea and I just held out here with setting up workshops for friends and deaf and hard of hearing services. And first I want to say that I'm really happy to have this opportunity for all of us because it's really nice to see the board and our director here and everybody and all the interpreters. I appreciate that. And I just had a few things to add. It's like one, you know, if there is any possibility that when the board does meet like if it's possible to meet during when we have our workshops, and socials like either before or half and then participate in our socials and workshops because then you will get to know the whole community and the whole community will feel so much more comfortable to express their concerns and their needs and their ideas with the board. And then you might even get more applicants to be on the board because our community will know you all better. So I think that's a start.

And then I wanted to say thinking about the company that you have hired, you know, to try to find a new director, like I wonder if they had a number of candidates apply to be a director for the school for the deaf in Michigan. And you know what happened with all

those candidates that they didn't accept. Maybe are they possible candidates that might want to come here? Just that is an idea.

So they don't have to start from the very scratch like the bottom trying to find people. And also I think the board, you know, being more involved with the whole deaf community here in all of our events you may find people right here, you know, that might be interested to someone to take Deb's place, which is really going to be hard. But, you know, we have to start somewhere. So and then one last thing I thought about, you know, it was very important what Louis brought up having different other kinds of sign language with the tactile, the protactile. And also like I wonder, you know, how -- I have not taken a class for quite a while I have to say. I need to. But it seems like sometimes you know, people come here, a lot of people are AS L1 and hardly anybody would sign up for ASL2 and ASL3. So I thought maybe some ways of making language more accessible is rather than just having the classes here with the same textbook that we've used for years and years to make it more interactive. Go out in the community. Take the class into a grocery store and learn all the signs for different food items and things like that. And actually make it more interaction so people are learning like language in a community instead of just with a textbook. So and maybe I might learn better too.

But any way I do appreciate this and thank you all for coming and please come to our workshops and socials. You are always invited. Thank you.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Tyler speaking. Anybody else have any comments for that.

>> I need a break. Can we have a break?

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: That is a good idea. We can take a quick.

>> I need a break too.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Okay, thank you for your comments. We are going to take a break. Ten minutes. Ten-minute break. The bathrooms are on the right as you go through.

[10-minute break]

>> Ten minutes, ten minutes, ten minutes.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler speaking and I will wait for everyone to get their seats and get comfortable. All right, I think everybody looks comfortable and ready to go for more comments and questions and what folks have to say. Yes, you you can be next.

>> Can everybody, well.

>> Microphone.

>> My name is sandy. And today when Amy got up and said that she had contacted the board about applying this is the second time I have heard of a deaf person applying to be on the board and we had a message and not talking to so it makes me wonder if there are other people out there. And that is where, you know, that kind of thing is happening. That is when people start getting angry. And talking to each other about it.

I also know that there was a deaf person who had asked about joining the search committee and was told, no. So and again that is when people start talking to each other and getting angry. And I guess I'm just wondering what is being done about those kinds of things.

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: This is Gail and we are always looking for improvement and thank you for bringing that up. And we will diligently look at the e-mails to make sure we look at every person who is interested and respond in a timely, appropriate manner. I'm sorry for the miscommunication for someone that wanted to be on the board. Please contact us again and we will get back to you in a timely manner.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler. All right, next?.

>> All right so if you want to join the board reach out. Who do we contact?

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler. Right now, sorry, this is Tyler, Charis is the person to reach out to. She is our board secretary. Thank you, Sarah. And Charis is the board secretary and that is the perfect person to reach out to, to e-mail. Any board member inquiries go ahead and reach out to Charis, e-mail her, please.

That is the process we currently are following to find new board members. That e-mail address should be on the posting.

>> I wanted to add additional comments, this is Roland. I saw Amy's comment and the other comment and I want to add my two cents here. I feel that the new Executive Director should be a deaf person. Someone who is strong culturally deaf and uses ASL. Because, yes, I know there are comments about the candidate of using the oral approach and that is true. But there is also a larger deaf community in the professional realm and the hearing community has never seen a professional deaf person in this role. So a deaf Executive Director can help the candidate, can help raise this community up.

[APPLAUSE]

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Roland, thank you. That is we are looking for someone to stand up and from a professional perspective understanding that there is multiple components, but I tend to agree with someone needs to stand up and lead, lead from the front, understand that that's what we are hoping for out of this. I appreciate the comments. Thank you.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler again. I am comfortable adding that I personally will be disappointed if any recruits, candidates that are not deaf, deaf blind or hard of hearing. I also want to see a person lead this organization that has that lived experience of hearing loss. And I think that is important. And I believe that we will find that person for our board and for our community. All right next comment. Go ahead. Go ahead and stand up right there.

>> I did want to add -- shoot, all right. I will come stand at the front. You're going to get your steps in.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: You will get your steps in today.

>> All right, it's a lot easier to sign in front of a video rather than in front of a live audience here but okay.

So excuse me if I'm a little nervous. My question, shoot, what was my question? It says a lot how when people have to continually reach out to a board to be involved in something. So the deaf you know, the deaf community is very small. So when one person says something, you know it's expressed to the community at large. It can be -- it's a very aggressive thing. So just know that happens. Thank you. So if you say you're going to do it, do it.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler. Next up?.

>> Hello. This is JJ. Okay, so I do have a question. About fundraising and things. I was looking at the 2023-FFO form, it's an IRS tax form. And it lists the programs and the money that they make. You have 500,000 in your savings account. And I'm wondering if you could look at using some of, I mean I do know you need to save some money but wondering if you can use some of that money to pay for some staff and having health insurance and looking at mental health program. And capacity grants. I noticed on the 2023-FFO form it says you served 600 people. Is that accurate? Also my third question is you say you serve 27 counties. What kind of services are being provided to those 27 counties? Are we doing hearing aid assistance? To all of them? I'd like to have those numbers broken out for us, please, and thank you.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Sure, absolutely. Hi, this is Deb speaking. Looking at your 2023 form we do and I don't believe at that time we had 600,000 in our savings account. 500,000. I don't believe we had 500,000 in our executive savings account at that time. Maybe that was the goal with capital and everything. But we never had to my knowledge, and I can pull that up 500,000 in there. Not debating but saying off the top of my head. Typically we are around 300,000 is what we have had, excuse me. We keep 200,000 of that for a rainy day fund if for some reason an interpreter referral goes down or lose any grants or anything that will get us through a period of one year of just payroll, overhead, leases, anything like that. So that 200,000 is saved aside for that to make sure we have that. Then we have 100,000 that we use as disposal income if you will and that is to pay staff, to pay any other kind of bills we have, with that flexibility in there so that is where that point is there.

As far as our numbers, yes, we do serve at that time the date you pulled up we did certain that amount of people and that is going to be an interpreter referral, that is for hearing aids, that is going to be for kids, that is for ASL classes. And probably you know all the other things that we do within the agency. So, yes, easily we have served that many. And as you know from before when you work with the agency, JJ, it's hard to get all the demographics and that is one thing that we still struggle with is getting all the demographics. Not everyone wants to fill it out. You can't count the same person more than once. You realize that too. So that is why demographics sometimes are hard for us. And as far as the 27 counties that is interpreter referral. And that is excuse

me, I'm sorry, advocacy. A big part of that is advocacy, serving kids, serving families. Does that answer your question?.

>> Yes.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Thank you.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Okay this is Tyler and anyone else? Questions or comments? Yes. Come on up. .

>> I want you board members to see me here and to understand, oh, I'm sorry. And to understand what it represents. I know that we tend to have to be addressed and experience oppression because hearing people think they know best. And that's why we need that deaf representation within the deaf community and that is just period. That oppression needs to stop. And so take the time to look at that deaf president now movement. And why that happened. And look at that situation and then maybe you could get a little better. That is what we need. We need that -- you guys to take the time to do the self evaluation. And we need to be careful on how we are representing the deaf community. Thank you.

>> MICKEY C: This is Mickey speaking. I agree. I spent 44 years of my life understanding who we serve. And part of that reason is right in the front row, my mother. And I do agree that a strong deaf leader is invaluable to the community. I grew up with several deaf leaders in the tri city association for the deaf. Several men and women who stood up and led their own community. I'm open to that. I welcome that. And that's what we are asking N and V to help us find, thank you.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: I would like to add, Tyler speaking, I want to say thank you. For bringing up that deaf president now. I think that is a perfect example. I remember Spelman had that smile. On his face. And on the face, sorry, and that smirk, that smile and smirk over and over and over again. I know as a board with a hearing person that has the same Smelman smirk, it is an automatic no, I don't want to see that, I want to see the passion and see a person who gets it. Yeah, we won't have someone like that join the board who just has that smirk. We won't. All right, next, come on up. Oh.

>> Amy speaking. Smiling.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: It was the board chair.

>> JJ says I will let you guys know.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Her name was Spelman, she was the board chair for Gallaudet during that time. But what was your question, yeah? Oh, yeah, nice. You're, yeah, it will be a good discussion for sure. Yeah, I know, it's important for everyone to see and understand that. .

>> JJ: Hi again. All right so a question for the board. After you have heard from all of us, you have heard from the community and what we want are you planning to continue this kind of conversation? I think it's valuable for the board to consistently interact with the community, to open up this kind of meeting for groups, for hard of hearing, hearing, deaf blind, strong ASL deaf. Planning these interactions with those agencies that serve

the community. Are you going to open your board meetings to us? Are you going to allow people to come in and watch? Or are those conversations going to be private? Like what are you planning for that in the future?

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Sorry, I will wait for her to sit down. This is Tyler. So at our last town hall meeting in June, the board did discuss a few things. There were suggestions from the group that we had present. And one of those suggestions was is it possible to have open board meetings to the public where we continue discussions like that. Where we have board business, open to the public. But I think also opportunities for more involvement within the board and our activities.

I'm trying to remember everything from that meeting. Also for after this meeting we are having today, to collect those suggestions and comments and stories, thank you for sharing those. And discuss what we can do moving forward. We know communication through e-mail, Facebook, Instagram, we know that there is a lot of different ways currently in how we connect with the community and how the community can access information about board activities, organizational programs, projects. I want to tell you that we have a staff person filled. His name who is responsible for, he is communication staff and he is amazing but he is new. So we are working with him. How new is Phil? He has been here a couple years now but he is new. So meeting with him, meeting with community members and also learning about D&HHS. He is learning about the operations of our organization. Sorry, my finger spelling is slow. I want to know everything that you guys want to share with us. And understand I want to understand that. The hard part I'm finding as a board member myself is that we have these awesome ideas that are very exciting but then finding the funding at the same time the funding is challenging. And having the staff to facilitate those events. Especially on the weekends. As well as doing other jobs. We ask a lot from our staff. We ask them to support a lot within the community and our services. So I don't want all of that doing all of the things. I want to make sure that it's fair. I want the board and staff commitment to be equal. And I want to find a way, to find a good solution. So that we can have and serve as many people as possible. Okay.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Can I add something too? Yeah, I want to add something. JJ I just want to say that I did not address your mental health question and I apologize for that. Currently I am looking at network 180 and they have some additional funding available for communities like ours. It's a BHCC program behavior health crisis center. So I'm going to meet with them and to my knowledge it's funding available for additional for social workers, for interpreters and so on and so forth. I was not aware of it and just made aware of it and Nancy Pete and I will look into and see if we can do anything on that end. I thoroughly agree with the mental health crisis in Michigan, not just the hearing but the deaf, deaf blind and hard of hearing, we get consistent calls on it and breaks our hearts because as you know we have to go in and number one we have to explain why they need an interpreter and they have to pay for the interpreter and blah,

blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, we have to go through all of that before we can even get close to what is happening with this in-patient, what needs to happen, so on and so forth. And throughout the years I have gone to DODBHH meetings and discussed interpreter board meetings, the coalition and talked to Senators and State Representatives about this. And more needs to come from just me. They know that this is an issue within the state.

But how do we fix it? And so that is where we need more information, where I need more information, and the new Executive Director needs more information, how do we fix this? Where do we get funding? If we can get somebody on the west side of the state and we know there is a need there for a therapist or a psychologist, psychiatrist who is deaf and signs even. That would be wonderful. But how do we get them to the west side of the state? That's the hard part. And that is one program that we had years ago but unfortunately it was given back to network 180 then it was passed to Cherry Street, it was at Cherry Street for a long time now it has been passed back to network 180 again. So I know, we are in the Fox holes on a daily basis with the crisis that is going on and I appreciate you consistently bring it's up, where do we do and go and I wanted to let you know we do recognize that and we are doing what we can but yeah we have to do more. Absolutely. .

>> I have a comment, JJ.

>> This is JJ. Do you mind if I have a follow-up comment?

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: I just want to say something first. This is Gail. And when we met with N and V the board and the staff, it was unanimous that we wanted mental health. And that we wanted an Executive Director who could help move that forward. So when Deb leaves our commitment still stays always. On mental health. And JJ you can add on.

>> JJ: I'm very happy to hear about your commitment to raising mental health awareness. It's a very serious problem in our community. Probably double that in the bigger community. I really want to emphasize that the Executive Director needs to have experience with health administration. I think this agency specifically has a huge opportunity to look at healthcare services. And use any money that you have through health insurance. You know that the state and Federal cuts are coming. But you always have health insurance. So thank you for that. I commend you for that coming in.

Second question is: What is your plan to recruit more board members? Because like we've heard said today we need more deaf, deaf blind on board. But also you need people who are lawyers, accountants, have these different specialties represented within the board. So curious what is your outreach efforts look like to recruit more board members?

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: You're going to wait, okay, all right, you will hear my answer right now. Yeah, I feel a little stuck. Because we need a motivated deaf

community that are interested in joining the board. But also we need to go out and meet the deaf community. So hopefully events like today and events that we have hosted in the past will help us improve the trust and improve, yeah, the trust so that showing we will show up and we will be here and that we want to understand. It's hard to find a person who has the lived experience as a deaf or hard of hearing person. But also has time to be involved. Who has motivation. We want to see. And then lastly has the belief that the deaf experience in the State of Michigan needs to improve. I feel like, yeah, sure, we can find a person who has legal experience, sure. We can find a person with but can we find a person with legal experience that is also motivated and also understands the community and also has that lived experience in this community? For example, I know in Ann Arbor there is a deaf doctor there. Dr. Mike McKee. And I know that he is a very busy man. But that's the person that we are describing here. But I know Dr. McKee is too busy to serve on our board. So then I guess my question to all of you is: If you know of anybody that seems like they would be the right person or the right person for the job, I hope you tell them. I hope you encourage them to look up online, find our information, see if it's something they are interested in. And then also our part. We need to solve the issues that we currently have with communication, with you know, missing e-mails. Our communication we need to improve. And I think we need to discuss as a board how to centralize our e-mail maybe. Maybe we need more people. Or a new e-mail address specifically for inquiries of who wants to join the board. I don't know the solution yet for the communication improvements.

But, yeah, I'm disappointed that it happened and we will follow-up with Amy. And anybody else? I think you said another deaf person was also interested in joining the board, I want to know about that person as well. And so we can forward and follow-up with that.

>> JJ: Yes.

>> DEB ATWOOD: First, we have 15 minutes left for the meeting today. No, that is fine. .

>> JJ: Okay 15 minutes left. All right, thank you. Okay great, thank you so much Tyler for that. I think maybe you misunderstood my question though. I was not specifically talking about a deaf, deaf blind and hard of hearing board. I know that is nearly impossible. And we don't have that in Michigan that I'm aware of. I do think we have to recruit hearing people as well that are specialized in law, maybe work at law firms, CPA, accountant and people willing to be on the board and be involved.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Thank you, JJ.

>> MICKEY C: I will wait until you sit down.

Okay, I will answer the board question there. For those that do not know, we did recently have a lawyer on the board a lawyer to a hard of hearing child. And what a lot of people may not know is that even though they are a barred lawyer, they are very risk conscious about providing information and feedback. So while it is advantageous to

have somebody from the legal profession in there, they are very reluctant to offer legal advice in a pro bono fashion. So that is one thing to know. And we did have that. And then she did unfortunately resign from the board. But at one time and just recently, in the last year and a half we did have a lawyer on the board.

The second piece is we did have a CPA on the board. For a little while. And she was fantastic. And she carried a lot of workload. And unfortunately I mean fortunately for her she has a young family and the workload became too much. What I also want to reiterate is that every single board member up here is a volunteer. For all of you that have been on boards before, they are 99% of the time volunteer positions. So from an outreach perspective, we -- could we do more? Yes. We also we need to find more board members and we need to retain them for a longer period of time. So there is a lot of work to do. But please do know that we understand that we need certain professional candidates to help with different perspectives and different double checks. And checks and balances. Because I think ultimately that is what comes out of this is the checks and balances to make sure that there are good things happening that serve the community but also protect the financial and reputation of the agency. So great points. We still need to find those candidates. So if you have people, please do refer them. Thank you.

>> DEB ATWOOD: One thing I wanted to add to that is we have developed just recently a letter to go out to financial firms and legal firms and we are looking at them as a whole, not just in the Grand Rapids area. But Zeeland and all the areas and sending it to the firms asking if they have lawyers or accountants or CPAs or anything like that would be interested at least coming to a board meeting and seeing what we are all about. We have.

>> MICKEY C: I have one more thing.

>> DEB ATWOOD: We have an event.

>> MICKEY C: One more idea. I would really like -- and Roland this is probably for you because of your connectivity with the young deaf community. I'd love to see a couple of young deaf leaders step up. And learn. And so if you can pass that information along to students and what not, that would be awesome. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: This is Tyler. We have ten minutes left. Okay, yes, next, go ahead.

>> Okay, hello. Now, I remember in June we were talking about, you know, hiring the Executive Director. We had a goal of July. And the board members only had six and so we couldn't do any hiring of the Executive Director. So I had a question. What is the deadline to apply to be a board member? And then when will we start the applications for the Executive Director?

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: This is Gayle. And we have no deadline for applying for the board. When the spirit moves you, when you have the time, and you have a

commitment, please get in touch with Charis. Charis Austin. And as far as the Executive Director, we have not put out the announcement yet. When we do, which will be probably in the next couple weeks, then after that there is a four to six week and we narrowed it down to whether it's four or six deadline. And you will have that time to apply. Or whoever applies.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Okay, this is Tyler speaking. We've got still about ten minutes left anybody else want to speak? If you have something come right up. .

>> Hi, I'm Lori again. Well, I wanted to ask you like who is the responsibility right now to do the fundraising? Is it the board's or the director or.

>> MICKEY C: Everybody sitting in this room.

>> Okay, all right.

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: Everybody.

>> I just shared with Deb that like just for an example, this is only an example but there is an agency in Jackson that maybe gets produce from the farms and chop it all up in food and dehydrate it and send it to communities that don't have food like other countries. And I was thinking you know, they get a lot of money, a lot of money for funding. And they just hired different disability groups like that come and do different things. Like they might hire the blind for one day and other groups. And just for an example that is a way for us to reach out and share so that you can join together in getting some funds. It might be a nice thing for your community, whoever is interested to go maybe once a month or a couple of times a year and spend a couple hours there and chop up vegetables and dehydrate them and maybe they want to share some funding with us because we are working together. We are helping each other. I think that is the way for us to be able to get funding. And like for mental health maybe you know if we can work more with, well, we have some mental health organizations coming and present at the shops and then get to know the deaf community more. And then we can maybe do some work together or maybe they might be more interested to hire our interpreters for you know, when a deaf person does come there like Pine Rest or different mental health agencies. So I think there is just a ton of stuff that we can do together. And money will come in. But we have to like help them out too so that they can help us. So that's all I have to say. Thank you.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Thank you very much for those suggestions. I love those ideas. You know, things to make money, how we can fund raise and encourage the community connection. You know, being productive. I really love that idea. We need to make sure that we need to have support for that and have you know that our staff has the time. Those sort of things. I think I mentioned before that, you know, we just don't have enough staff at this time for, you know, these different projects that we want. You know, we have to commit to certain projects first. But all the ideas are -- I'm remembering them. I'm stacking them in my mind bank and we always need new ideas for connection and at the same time making some money. So that is a perfect comment

from the community. And I will definitely keep that in mind. And, you know, that program is always to make money. And also, you know, connect with the deaf community. The deaf blind and hard of hearing community. And doing an activity together.

One thing that I have learned from being a board member is, you know, that interpreters and the communication access it's a profession and they are paid to be here. That communication access. And so having money issues want to provide the access the way we want to provide it. I think that in the future if we want, you know, that support in social events, maybe, you know, there won't be as many interpreters here because it's a social thing and not a business thing. The board you know, meetings and those type of things are more official. You know, that is something to discuss to make sure there is communication access in these things. And that is a constant part of our discussion. And I'm talking too much now. My time is running out. I'm so sorry. I just want to answer all the questions.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Nancy did you want to say something. This will be the last question or last comment.

>> Okay, I would like to say something positive. I think it's time for you guys to come and do the fellowship with the community and I'm looking forward to more. And making sure that you guys are at the socials. Now, if people ask me questions, I wonder if this transcript can be shared with the folks out there? Because I would rather have word for word than my version of what is being said.

>> MICKEY C: We are finding out right now. We have no reason not to. We just have to figure out how to print it. And get it on. So.

>> DEB ATWOOD: Ms. CART is saying yes she can do it.

>> MICKEY C: Thank you. So, yes, Nancy, it can be done.

>> TYLER SMELTEKOP: Well, this is Tyler speaking. I will let Gail have the final say but I wanted to say thank you everyone for coming out today, looking forward to doing this again with you all. I hope to meet and see you all again after this event and if I have not mentioned before I want to get to meet you before the event and I want to hand it over to Gail to wrap us up today.

>> GAIL MACEWICZ: Thank you everyone for coming. And I appreciate all your comments, remarks, concerns. And they are all valid. And we Charis has been diligently taking notes. And we as a board will get together and try to develop a plan to address your concerns, your questions, and find effective ways to get back to you about those concerns. And develop good communication because that is what we want. We want to know you and what you want. We want you to know us. And because we are here for you. And that is our main goal is you. So in closing thank you again. And I'm so pleased with the turn out. And I look forward to seeing you all again in the future. And thanks for our diligent and hardworking interpreters. And let's give them a hand.
[APPLAUSE]

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And after that going to close. Good-bye everyone.