



TN Department of
Human Services

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

2021 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 § 71-4-2102 as amended.

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, provision of direct support, and culturally appropriate services affecting Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing Tennesseans and their families through coordination, public awareness, 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 for 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 that provide 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 that impact people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing 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 of programs for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing;
7. Authorize the Tennessee Council for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing Executive Director to prepare and submit 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, 2020 – June 30, 2021 Report

Major Activities

The Council was involved in a number of activities during the last state fiscal year. Activities included:

- Renegotiated and finalized new contracts with grantees across the state. As a result, 5 out of 6 grantee contracts were renewed.

- Held a community meeting for individuals in the Knoxville service area to receive feedback about the kinds of services needed in the region and how the community would like services to be delivered. As a direct result of the community meeting, a plan was developed for redistributing provision of services in the counties and service areas among three grantees. Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, BridgesTN, and Partnership Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services all added several counties as part of their service area in exchange for an increase in their state funding.
- Provided extensive self-advocacy training for those who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, or Hard of Hearing, businesses, families of those who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, or Hard of Hearing and community partners 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 six (6) community centers to provide more educational workshops focused on understanding and learning how to choose between on-site interpreters and video remote interpreting at local hospitals.
- The Mental Health Task Force, a TCDDDBHH sponsored initiative, continued to meet monthly 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 a training that will be offered to providers across the state in 2022. Trainings will address the unique needs of people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing in both inpatient and outpatient mental health settings.
- 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 TCDDDBHH Council members and

community centers on their behalf. Support was provided to grantee agencies to provide Technology and Deaf Culture workshops.

- Provided information for Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing people by attending various community events and conferences on behalf of the Tennessee Department of Human Services and TCDDDBHH. As the pandemic continued throughout this year, the Council was represented at a variety of virtual events including those sponsored by the Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness, the Tennessee Deaf Blind Project, the Tennessee Organization of the Deaf Blind, Hearing Loss Association of America, and the Deaf Literacy Initiative.
- The Executive Director developed and continued to present 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.
- As a direct result of the pandemic, TCDDDBHH reviewed ways to improve access to alerts and updates for people who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing. All grantees provided real time access in American Sign Language to press conferences and briefings throughout the state whenever possible. To ensure that individuals who are hard of hearing had access, each grantee worked with local television stations to provide and/or improve closed captioning services. Throughout this process, Council members provided feedback regarding informational events. Feedback shared by the community at large was immediately passed to the appropriate grantee to resolve any challenges.
- The Executive Director of TCDDDBHH supported grantees in seeking opportunities for outreach and advocacy throughout the pandemic. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, each grantee was contacted about initiating advocacy efforts to ensure that all updates about COVID-19 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, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing

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.

- The Executive Director, TCDDDBHH members, and grantee Directors and employees continued to monitor and provide appropriate feedback to news outlets around the state to ensure that they maintained visibility of the interpreter onscreen throughout important announcements and provided quality closed captioning services for announcements. Although there were some issues with this, most advocacy efforts were effective and resulted in significant positive progress towards full access for Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing customers throughout the state.
- As a part of their grant agreement with TCDDDBHH, all Grantees have continued to provide services in either an onsite or 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 both in person and virtually throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Developing an appropriate hybrid platform in order to provide access to visitors was a monumental achievement. All meetings had 40+ attendees including statewide community members, resulting in full access due to the hybrid platform.
- Due to two vacancies on the Council, four qualified nominees were submitted to the Governor's Office for consideration in May, 2021.

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 were awarded to the following organizations:

- Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Johnson City
- Partnership Deaf Services, Chattanooga
- BridgesTN, Nashville
- Jackson Center for Independent Living, Jackson
- BridgesWEST, Memphis.

As stated earlier in the report, the State opted not to renew the contract with the Knoxville Center of the Deaf for convenience as outlined in the contract and a new plan for service provision was adopted. The outcome of this plan will be addressed in the 2021-2022 report.

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

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 of Rehabilitation Services. The Division of Rehabilitation Services provides funding through 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:

Performance Based Services	Performance Metrics
Outreach and Referral	905 Contacts
American Sign Language Interpreting Services (Pro Bono)	1,593 Pro Bono Interpreting Hours
Client Advocacy for Deaf, DeafBlind, & Hard of Hearing	960 Advocacy Services Provided
Educational Workshops and Training	450 Hours
Activities, Events and Social Media Participation	215 Events and Activities



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:

MEMBER NAME	ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION
Dr. Sandra Edwards	Tennessee Department of Education – Tennessee School for the Deaf
Tiffany Kelley	Tennessee Department of Human Services
Morgan Zialcita	Tennessee Department of Health
Alex King	Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services
Mariena Terry	Deaf Consumer Representative
Phil Yater	Hard of Hearing Consumer Representative
Carl Sherard	Deaf Consumer Representative

James Moore	Hard of Hearing Consumer Representative
John Johnson	Deaf-Blind Consumer Representative
Tyler Samuel	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

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 in Tennessee. The Mental Health Task Force formed through TCDDDBHH has established goals and an action plan to address this issue. A training has been developed to assist mental health providers in working with patients who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing.
- Due to the reevaluation of service providers in the East Tennessee region, a series of community meetings will be held throughout the next year to gauge the needs of the community and collect feedback from customers. The first meeting was held in August 2021 and meetings will continue throughout the year.
- Currently, the State of Tennessee has only one Certified Deaf Interpreter residing in the state. According to the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) is a person who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing and has demonstrated knowledge and understanding of interpreting, deafness, the Deaf community, and Deaf culture. These individuals have specialized training and/or experience in the use of gesture, mime, props, drawings, and other tools to enhance communication. CDIs possess native or near-native fluency in

American Sign Language and are recommended for a broad range of assignments where an interpreter who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing would be beneficial. The grantees will be providing training to Deaf persons who are interested in becoming a Deaf Interpreter/Certified Deaf Interpreter. TCDDDBHH plans to continue to provide and support this training on how to utilize such interpreters in a variety of settings when necessary.

- The Council continues to support the endeavors of the Tennessee Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and members of the community to develop a proposal for state licensure of American Sign Language Interpreters. This proposal will be written and submitted 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. Unfortunately, these efforts were stalled by the pandemic, but TCDDDBHH will continue to support TNRID in their work toward implementing licensure.
- 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 Bridges for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Nashville (BridgesTN), 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, a presence in this region 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 station 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 initiatives 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 continues 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>