

# Annual Report

## 2024



**For State Fiscal Year July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024**

**West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
100 Dee Drive  
Charleston, West Virginia 25311**

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*WVCDHH is an office within the West Virginia Department of Health.*

The 2024 Annual Report for the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH) details the performance of WVCDHH between June 30, 2023, and June 31, 2024. WVCDHH focuses on issues of significance for deaf and hard of hearing West Virginians, with WVCDHH staff and board members working diligently to attain goals set by the strategic plan. Additionally, the staff strives to provide outreach, information, assistance, and training to anyone in West Virginia affected by concerns related to varying degrees of deafness.

## **Overview**

*The mission of the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH) is to advocate for, develop, and coordinate public policies, regulations, and programs to assure full and equal opportunity for persons who are deaf and hard of hearing in West Virginia.*

### **Background**

WVCDHH was established in 1989 and is committed to carrying out its mission: working statewide to provide opportunities through which the deaf and hard of hearing can participate fully as active, responsible, productive, and independent citizens.

### **Obligations**

Information: Collect and maintain information regarding education, communication, independent living, recreation, employment, health and mental health services, substance abuse, and the services necessary to support the ability of deaf and hard of hearing individuals to function in society.

Interpreters: Provide services related to interpreters, mainly by establishing and maintaining a registry of qualified interpreters throughout West Virginia.

Outreach: Familiarize the public with the rights, needs, and services of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Investigate: Investigate the condition of deaf and hard of hearing West Virginians to access currently offered programs and to recognize the need for the establishment of new programs.

Training: WVCDHH may establish workshops for teaching interpretive skills, in-service training, and counseling for the deaf and hard of hearing.

### **Staff**

Executive Director – Erik Essington – February 2022 to Present

Project Director – Sarah Lowther – April 2015 to Present

Assistant to the Director – Gwen Bryant – February 2024 to Present

### **Board Members**

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community Representatives:

**Paul See** – Chairperson – term expires June 30, 2026

**John Burdette** – WV Association of the Deaf (WVAD) Recommended – term expires June 30, 2026

**Gloria Hollen** – WVAD Recommended – term expires June 30, 2026

**Roy Forman** – WVAD Recommended – term expires June 30, 2026  
**Julie Shoeman** – term expires June 30, 2025

Parent of a Deaf/Hard of Hearing Child:

**Dr. Christine Firkins** – appointed May 6, 2024- term expires June 30, 2025

Professionals Working Within the Community:

**Dr. Nancy Gillispie** – Audiologist – term expires June 30, 2025

**Currently Vacant** – Otolaryngologist – term expired June 30, 2020

**Megan Wolfe** – Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing – term expires June 30, 2027

Ex-Officio Members:

**Angela Wilson** – West Virginia Division of Labor  
*Designee for Mitchell E. Woodrum, Commissioner*

**Mary Anne Clendenin** – West Virginia Department of Education  
*Designee for David L. Roach, State Superintendent of Schools*

**Rae Bates** – West Virginia Department of Health  
*Designee for Sherri A. Young, Cabinet Secretary*

**Rachel Gill** – West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services  
*Designee for Pisnu Bua-Iam, Director*

**Mekell Golden** – Bureau for Public Health  
*Designee for Dr. Matthew Christiansen, Commissioner*

**Regina Woodcock** – WV Birth to Three Program

**W. Clayton Burch** – West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind

**Dawn Embrey King** – West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children

**Meeting Schedule**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Members Present</b>	<b>Ex-Officio Present</b>
August 10, 2023	Holiday Inn-Charleston	12	5
November 3, 2023	WVCDHH-Charleston	13	6
February 29, 2024	WVCDHH-Charleston	13	6
May 3, 2024	DRS-Martinsburg	12	5

**Strategies, Activities and Programs**

W.Va. Code §5-14-9 states that WVCDHH shall make an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature which shall include its recommendations and programs. Currently, WVCDHH has the following areas of responsibility:

**Information**

*Goal: Maintain accessible information relevant to the deaf and hard of hearing communities.*

*Strategy: Provide educational information to the deaf and hard of hearing, their families, and the public. Develop an information clearinghouse.*

- WVCDHH staff distributes informational brochures to interpreters, hiring entities of interpreters and deaf and hard of hearing individuals regarding standard practice in the state of West Virginia, as well as the rights of individuals with hearing loss.
- WVCDHH provides information on social media and at events and exhibits to inform the public on Commission activities and programs.
- The WVCDHH produces and distributes a monthly electronic newsletter featuring articles on topics such as parent-to-parent support, education, and healthcare. Each edition highlights agencies and organizations that provide services and resources for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, helping to promote awareness, collaboration, and access to critical resources across the state.

*Recommendations: WVCDHH recommends purchasing new and current resources with the focus on improving interpreter skills and communication access for families with deaf or hard of hearing children to be added to the resources housed at the West Virginia Library Commission.*

## **Interpreters**

*Goals: Develop and maintain programs that support the interpreting needs of the deaf and hard of hearing in West Virginia.*

*Strategy: Maintain an interpreter registry with appropriate fees; continue interpreter task force meetings to solicit input and understand needs.*

- WVCDHH maintains the West Virginia Registry of Interpreters (WVRI). The Commission ensures that working interpreters within West Virginia meet a minimum qualification in order to provide the most appropriate and effective services for deaf and hard of hearing individuals who use American Sign Language.
- WVCDHH staff continues to revise and publish an interpreter directory containing all publicly listed qualified interpreters throughout the state. The directory includes information for hiring entities on standard practices for utilizing an interpreter when working with individuals with hearing loss. The directory is updated as needed to reflect the addition of newly qualified interpreters, as well as the removal of expired credentials. The information in the directory is also updated to provide current and relevant information.
- WVCDHH is a Local Test Administrator for the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA). These tests are administered by WVCDHH at no cost to the interpreter, except for fees paid to Boys Town National Research Hospital for the assessment.
- WVCDHH regularly fields inquiries regarding the process of hiring qualified interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

A list of qualifications held by professional interpreters in West Virginia may be found below. Please note that some interpreters have multiple qualifications and are counted in multiple categories.

<b>Certification</b>	<b>SFY 2024</b>
Total Interpreters Listed	75
In-state Interpreters	29
Out-of-state Interpreters	46
EIPA total	36
NAD certified, RID certified, and VQAS/State screened total	105
Interpreter Agencies	12
<i>NAD Level</i>	
Level V	3
Level IV	4
Level III	3
<i>RID Level</i>	
NIC Advanced	7
NIC Master	4
NIC	22
CI	0
CT	0
CI/CT	14
CDI	0
SC:L	5
<i>VQAS Level (transliterating)</i>	
Level IV	0
Level III	8
Level II	4
Level I	0
<i>VQAS Level (Interpreting)</i>	
Level IV	0
Level III	3
Level II	11
Level I	0

*Recommendations: WVCDHH recommends the ability to outline repercussions for entities that hire an unqualified interpreter, as well as for interpreters continuing to work without meeting the qualifications outlined in W.Va. Code §5-14A. WVCDHH recommends the development of training to be offered to state agencies to ensure an understanding and familiarity with utilizing the directory, along with hiring and working with interpreters and individuals with hearing loss. WVCDHH also recommends funding opportunities to assist West Virginia interpreters in becoming qualified and able to register.*

**Outreach**

*Goal: Attain high levels of citizen and stakeholder engagement and community problem-solving for the deaf and hard of hearing to familiarize the public with their rights, needs, and services.*

*Strategy: Utilize social marketing to promote the rights, needs and services of the deaf and hard of hearing through a Facebook page and other social media as needed; implement and maintain projects/activities that support the rights, needs, and services of the deaf and hard of hearing communities; assure the availability of accessible smoke alarms; maintain relationships with emergency responders to improve services to the deaf and hard of hearing; and identify, monitor and make recommendations regarding relevant governmental policies affecting the deaf and hard of hearing.*

- The WVCDHH utilizes its Facebook page as a vital communication tool to engage with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities across West Virginia. This platform enables the Commission to share timely, accessible information—often translated into American Sign Language (ASL)—that might otherwise be unavailable through traditional channels. Over the reporting period, the Facebook page experienced significant growth and engagement, including:
  - **14,912 total interactions** — a **100% increase** over the previous year
  - **8,966 reactions**
  - **1,851 comments**
  - **4,095 shares**

This continued growth reflects the importance of accessible digital outreach in meeting the communication needs of the community.

- WVCDHH holds an annual Deaf Awareness Day in the Upper Rotunda of the State Capitol during the legislative session. Deaf Awareness Day was created to promote awareness of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. The event also allows for networking opportunities with exhibitors from various agencies, Deaf associations, and other community resources focusing on services for people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind.
- WVCDHH hosts other events during the year as planning and budget permit.
- WVCDHH continues to distribute informational visor cards to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, along with all law enforcement offices within the state. Visor cards assist with communication when an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing is stopped by law enforcement. Since the project began, over 4,000 visor cards have been distributed to individuals and organizations, which include law enforcement offices and WV Division of Motor Vehicle offices throughout the state.
- WVCDHH continues to manage the Accessible Smoke Alarm Project, for which ADA-compliant smoke alarms are distributed to deaf and hard of hearing homeowners. Information for recipients may be found below.

#### *Accessible Smoke Alarm Project Summary SFY 2024*

*During SFY 2024, WVCDHH provided the following smoke alarms to qualified West Virginia residents:*

Type of Device	Number Distributed
Standard Smoke Alarm - First Alert SA320	6
Strobe Alarm - Gentex 7139LS	6
Bedshaker Alarm - Lifetone HLAC150	6

- WVCDHH manages a Telephonic Communication Device Loan Program (TCDLP) in which TTY, amplified telephone, and captioned telephone equipment are distributed to qualifying applicants. Loan recipient information may be found below.

***Telephonic Communication Device Loan Program Summary***

***During SFY 2023, WVCDHH provided the following telecommunication devices to qualified West Virginia residents:***

Type of Device	Number Distributed
TTYs	0
Amplified Phones	1
Captioned Phones*	0

- WVCDHH fields inquiries from community members as well as the public on a daily basis. A listing of the nature of those inquiries may be found below.

Type of Inquiry	FY 2024
Assistance Finding an Interpreter	9
Interpreter Registration	20
Equipment Requests	10
Laws/State Code	4
Training or Seminars (including interpreter workshops)	15
Visitors to WVCDHH	4
General Information Requests	17

**Strategic Educational and Government Partnerships**

WVCDHH maintains a strong presence in key educational and government partnerships, allowing for the development and continuation of meaningful relationships with organizations that support the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals across West Virginia. Highlights of these collaborative efforts include:

- Partnered with the University of Charleston to establish an American Sign Language (ASL) Studies Minor, launching Fall 2024.
- Supported the transition of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) program from Westside Middle School to Horace Mann Middle School.
- Collaborated with Marshall University’s School Psychology Program to enhance inclusive practices for D/HH students.
- Continued monitoring and advocacy for legislation impacting the D/HH community, including:

- House Bills 3035 and 4414
- Senate Bill 274

WVCDHH also remains actively involved in the following advisory boards, committees, and collaborative initiatives:

- WV Hands & Voices Board
- Newborn Hearing Screening Advisory Committee
- Access and Functional Needs Workgroup – Center for Threat Preparedness
- Pierpont Community & Technical College ASL/Interpreter Education Program Advisory Board
- Disability Rights of West Virginia
- University of Charleston – School of Arts and Sciences
- West Virginia Department of Education
- Special Education and Student Support Services in Kanawha and Harrison Counties

*Recommendations: WVCDHH recommends revitalizing the TCDLP to distribute more current technology to provide persons with hearing loss equal communication access. WVCDHH would also like to revitalize the terms of the loan program to ensure loan applicants are accountable for the equipment distributed.*

**Investigate**

*Goal: Investigate the condition of the deaf and hard of hearing, prioritizing the aged, homeless, needy, victims of rubella, victims of abuse and neglect, group homes, and services for the multi-disabled deaf and hard of hearing.*

*Strategy: Every two years, conduct a meeting at the WVAD conference to gather information about the condition and availability of services; work with WVAD to schedule and hold town hall meetings; conduct a needs assessment to determine the needs and gaps of the deaf and hard of hearing communities; establish a workgroup to develop the needs assessment tool; disseminate needs assessment through a variety of channels; analyze data; and write and publish a report. Attend local deaf and hard of hearing events: each member of the WVCDHH staff/board must attend at least two deaf or hard of hearing events per year.*

- WVCDHH staff attend various community events throughout the state.
- WVCDHH staff fielded complaints from community members. A general list of the nature of those complaints may be found below.

**Total Complaints for SFY 2024**

<b>Reason for Complaint</b>	<b>Count</b>
Hiring unregistered/unqualified interpreters	12
Refusal to provide interpreter services	16
Refusal to provide reasonable accommodations	9

*Recommendations: WVCDHH would like to establish a system to follow up with violating entities to provide guidance and education throughout the event of a complaint. WVCDHH will continue to create workshops to educate private and public organizations of necessary steps to comply with the ADA and W. Va. Code concerning the rights of deaf and hard of hearing citizens to allow prevention of future complaints.*

### **Empowering Through Education and Engagement**

*Goal: Provide opportunities for continuing education and learning in the areas of interpretive skills, in-service training, and counseling.*

*Strategy: Provide at least two annual workshops or videos each year on topics identified in meetings or needs assessment. Conduct a minimum of two workshops annually for various public groups (hospitals, state agencies, etc.); work with Disability Rights of West Virginia and others to develop a plan for training the medical community; and provide annual professional development opportunities for interpreters.*

- WVCDHH is a Certification Maintenance Program (CMP) sponsor through RID, which allows Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to be offered.
- WVCDHH attended the ASLTA 2023 Conference-June & July 2023
- WVCDHH attended The Student Success Summit, co-sponsored by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, the West Virginia Department of Education, West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education, and West Virginia GEAR UP, is a statewide conference focusing on creating seamless, supportive, and lifelong learning systems for West Virginia's students- July 12 through 13, 2023.
- WVCDHH attended the TDI Conference: *Digital Inclusion for All*'- July 27 through 29, 2023
- WVCDHH attended the WV Deaf Service Center's ASL Summer Camp for deaf children ages eight to 13- August 7 through 9, 2023.
- WVCDHH attended Shoal's Elementary School Open House- August 17, 2023
- WVCDHH attended the WV Hands & Voices 10th annual Open House Picnic – August 19, 2023
- WVCDHH's Executive Director Erik Essington met with Vital Signs w/ Richard Rashid, MD to discuss Deafness in West Virginia- August 25, 2023
- WVCDHH attended CAD's West Virginia's 75th anniversary picnic- August 26, 2023
- WVCDHH attended and presented at the WVSDB Fall Conference 2023- September 28 through 29, 2023
- WVCDHH attended and presented at The 2023 College Equity Virtual Conference: *Strengthening Access, Inclusion, and Belonging for Deaf Students*- October 17 through 19, 2023
- WVCDHH attended The SERID 2023 Conference Committee Making Connections to Build Bridges because Working Together: *We Create Change!* - October 26 through 29, 2023
- WVCDHH presented at the WVU School of Medicine 'Working with Deaf and Hard of hearing Patients' - October 30, 2023
- WVCDHH attended 'Ignorance Isn't Bliss: Equity Implications for Educational Interpreter Supervision!' EIPA Training- February 3, 2024
- WVCDHH attended Deaf Coffee Chat- February 26, 2024

- WVCDHH attended the Beyond the IDEA and WIOA Requirements: *Knowing what to expect when it matters!*- February 28, 2024
- WVCDHH attended Deaf Interpreters in K-12 and Administrator Perspectives on Deaf Learners!- April 6, 2024
- WVCDHH attended and presented at Deaf Interpreters in K-12 and Administrator Perspectives on Deaf Learners!- April 19, 2024
- WVCDHH attended and presented at Parliamentarian Training-Knoxville Center of the Deaf- April 20, 2024
- WVCDHH attended and presented at Shoals Elementary DHH Night- April 23, 2024
- WVCDHH attended and presented at Martinsburg's deaf Community Townhall- May 4, 2024
- WVCDHH attended *A Practical Introduction to Disability Awareness* webinar- May 16, 2024
- WVCDHH attended and presented at MHAS Developing Competency in Mental Health Treatment for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals- May 17, 2024
- WVCDHH organized and presented NCDS ASL 1, a 15 week Training for families with deaf members- May 25, 2024
- WVCDHH hosted Deaf/HH Night with the Charleston Dirty Birds -June 21, 2024. Over 200 deaf/HH community members attended.
- WVCDHH attended the West Virginia School Safety Conference - October 26 through 27, 2024

*Recommendations: The WVCDHH recommends the allocation of additional funds for the WVCDHH budget to increase its ability to provide training/facilitation for various private/public entities.*

## WVCDHH Financial Report SFY 2023-2024

**Total Appropriated for SFY 2024:**

General Revenue:	\$234,018.00
Special Revenue:	\$17,819.00
Total:	\$251,837.00

**Expenditures:**

Personnel:	\$119,710.33
Employee Benefits:	\$34,231.24
Employee & Board Travel:	\$11,638.72
Reimbursement:	\$5,295.00
Professional Services / Interpreters:	\$7,688.35
Office Rent:	\$12,874.56
Office Equipment / Expenses:	\$2,000.11
Rental Machines (Copier):	\$1,978.36
Association Dues:	\$516.37
Training/Development:	\$875.00
Total Expenditures:	\$207,481.81
Accrued Expenses:	\$18,830.02
Uncommitted/Unexpended Balance:	\$25,525.17
Total:	\$251,837.00

## Acronyms

<i>AA/AAS</i>	<i>Associate Degree</i>
<i>ADA</i>	<i>Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990</i>
<i>ASL</i>	<i>American Sign Language</i>
<i>BA/BS</i>	<i>Bachelor's Degree</i>
<i>CDI</i>	<i>Certified Deaf Interpreter</i>
<i>CED</i>	<i>Center for Excellence in Disabilities</i>
<i>CEU</i>	<i>Continuing Education Units</i>
<i>CI</i>	<i>Certified Interpreter</i>
<i>CI</i>	<i>Cochlear Implant</i>
<i>CMP</i>	<i>Certificate Maintenance Program</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>Certified Transliterater</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Division of Personnel</i>
<i>DRS</i>	<i>Division of Rehabilitation Services</i>
<i>EIPA</i>	<i>Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment</i>
<i>FY</i>	<i>Fiscal Year</i>
<i>LTA</i>	<i>Local Test Administrator</i>
<i>MUGC</i>	<i>Marshall University Graduate College</i>
<i>NA</i>	<i>No Answer/Not Applicable</i>
<i>NAD</i>	<i>National Association of the Deaf</i>
<i>OHRD</i>	<i>Organization and Human Resource Development</i>
<i>PERD</i>	<i>Performance Evaluation and Research Division</i>
<i>Ph.D.</i>	<i>Doctoral Degree</i>
<i>RID</i>	<i>Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf</i>
<i>TDD</i>	<i>Telecommunications Device for the Deaf</i>
<i>TTY</i>	<i>Teletypewriter</i>
<i>VP</i>	<i>Video Phone</i>
<i>WVAD</i>	<i>West Virginia Association of the Deaf</i>
<i>WVCDHH</i>	<i>West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</i>
<i>WVDE</i>	<i>West Virginia Department of Education</i>
<i>WVDHHR</i>	<i>West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources</i>
<i>WVSDB</i>	<i>West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind</i>