

Missouri Communicator

Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Winter 2018 Edition



MCDHH works with individuals, service providers, businesses, organizations, and state agencies to improve the lives and opportunities of all Missourians with hearing loss.

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Legislative Progress for Hearing Aid Access

Opeoluwa Sotonwa, MCDHH Executive Director

The Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 was passed into law by the United States Congress in August 2017. The law would make some categories of hearing aids available over-the-counter and without prescriptions. At the heel of passing this legislation, MCDHH wrote a position paper focusing on the need to provide federal funding for hearing aids and sent it to Missouri's representatives in Congress.



As a state agency, MCDHH works hand-in-hand with individuals, organizations, service providers, businesses, and other state agencies to advocate for policies that would make meaningful impacts on the lives of Missourians who are Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing. That MCDHH has been advocating for hearing aid legislation for the past decade in Missouri should not be a surprise as there are more than 500,000 Missourians who could benefit.

After sending our position paper, I was invited to Congress for one-on-one conversations with several legislators. I had productive meetings with the offices...

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Meet Our Commissioners

Donna G. Schreiner, Chair

Seat for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Member

Shelly Jones, Vice Chair

Seat for Representative for Interpreters

Mary E. Hale

Seat for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Member

Owen VandeVelde

Seat for Parent of a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child

Wendy Jensen

Seat for Local Public School Administration

Dr. Katie Barton

Seat for Audiologist

Vacant

Seat for DESE or MSD

Vacant

Seat for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Organizations

Meet Our Staff

Opeoluwa Sotonwa

Executive Director

Dee Sanfilippo

MICS Coordinator

Jessica Brown

Interpreter Certification Specialist

Christopher Ludvigsen

Community Support Liaison

Emily Morrison

Information Program Specialist

Andrew Housewright

Staff Interpreter

Laurie Lister

Office Support Specialist

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...of Senators Roy Blunt, Claire McCaskill and Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer.

Senator Blunt is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies. He said the bipartisan support for the hearing aid legislation was necessary for a better condition of Missourians in need of hearing aids. Senator McCaskill explained why she co-sponsored the Over-the-Counter hearing aid bill. She said the

Opeoluwa Sotonwa with Senator Claire McCaskill, co-sponsor of the Over-The-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017



Learn more about MCDHH's legislative priorities for the upcoming year on Page 4 or by attending one of our events listed on Page 6.

income, thus providing for the needs of their families. This will reduce the expense of unemployment benefits to the state while generating more revenue.

MCDHH has worked with Representative Mike Kelley to initiate another bill right here in Missouri which will make funding available for low-income Missourians to purchase hearing aids. When this bill is passed, MCDHH will be able to procure hearing aids for Low-Income Missourians including the veterans.

An estimated 600,000 Missourians are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, 90% of which could benefit from hearing aids to live, work, and raise a family. The high cost of hearing aids should not be a barrier to these basic life activities. For the growth of any nation to be meaningful, it has to be inclusive.

Opeoluwa Sotonwa with a member of Senator Roy Blunt's staff after a meeting in his Washington, D.C. office.

Opeoluwa Sotonwa with Congressman Blaine Luetkemeyer at his office in Washington, D.C.

bill was just a first step towards several other things Congress can do to make hearing aids both accessible and affordable. Moreover, since it is a bipartisan issue with majority acceptance and potential benefits for Missourians, Congressman Luetkemeyer promised to collaborate with other colleagues to ensure hearing aids accessibility receives national attention.

With access to hearing aids, many Hard of Hearing Missourians could gain employment and earn an



2018 Legislative Priorities

Each year, MCDHH selects a handful of issues to focus on during the legislative session. The choices are dependent on a variety of factors: current needs, funding availability, community and organizational support, and climate of the legislature, among other things. The following are priorities that MCDHH will be focusing on throughout the 2018 legislative session:

Hearing Aids Funding

Goal: To set establish a statewide hearing aid distribution program for low-income individuals.

Why this is needed: Many Missourians with hearing loss are not able to afford hearing aids; giving them access to hearing aids can improve communication in the workplace and in relationships with family and friends.

Rep. Mike Kelley filed HB 1868

Board for Certification of Interpreters

Goal: To restructure the BCI to be housed within MCDHH.

Why this is needed: This bill will reduce BCI's gubernatorial appointments from five to three. At the end of 2017, the Governor's Task Force on Boards and Commissions recommended the BCI be merged with the State Committee of Interpreters.

Senator Jeanie Riddle filed SB 848

Language Assessment

Goal: To establish an advisory committee that will oversee a statewide language assessment program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children ages 0-8.

Why this is needed: Closely monitoring language skills—in both English and ASL—will provide more information for parents to make decisions about their child's education. Without an early understanding of language skills, many of these children experience language delay or deprivation, which can have a negative long-term impact on their learning.

Rep. Travis Fitzwater filed HB 1798

Drivers License Reform

Goal: To make the license system more efficient and culturally appropriate for Deaf and Hard of Hearing drivers.

Why this is needed: Right now, the code used to identify a driver as Deaf or Hard of Hearing on a license is J88; however, many officers are not able to quickly identify this code. MCDHH is working to change the code from J88 to DHH for quicker recognition. Additionally, this legislation will remove the outdated term "hearing impaired" from law and allow MCDHH to create vlogs describing these changes. The vlogs will be accessible online and at all Missouri DMV Offices.

Rep. Lyle Rowland filed HB 1572
Senator Jeanie Riddle filed SB 814

The Impact of a Hearing Aid

Representative Mike Kelley, District 127



Where to start, I was always a good student and did well in high school but looking back I think I pulled off most of my good grades by a combination of natural wisdom and a little bit of luck. The struggle to understand all that was being discussed came to a head in college as I struggled to understand the instructors and struggled in class. I often say I didn't finish school because

of a job offer I couldn't pass up with McDonalds in upper management but I think if I really thought about it, my struggle with hearing probably played a bigger role than I thought till now to which I have never admitted. I've always been a hard worker and good at leading when it was required. I often tell people I'm an introvert but that may not be accurate. I may be an extrovert that has always acted introverted because of my self consciousness stemming from my hearing loss.

Well, that all changed one day when a man named Dick Clay came into my life. He came by the McDonalds that I managed and I noticed his Beltone name tag. I asked about hearing tests and stated I was sure I had hearing loss but it had been years since I was tested. He encouraged me to come in for a free hearing test. During this test he stated I had severe hearing loss and he was impressed with how well I was doing with my job and interacting with people. I told him it was a daily struggle. Then when he gave me the price for the hearing aid he recommended, it might as well have been a million dollars because it was way out of my price range. I went back and was working when the man I was employed by came up and asked about the hearing test. I told him the results and he asked if I had ordered a hearing aid? I said no the cost was out of my price range and I'd just keep doing like I had been as I was getting by one day at a time. He then said no order the hearing aid I'm going to buy it for you. Now the truth is I needed two but I wasn't comfortable asking for help with one I sure wasn't going to say I needed



Opeoluwa Sotonwa presents Representative Mike Kelley with the Come Together Award during the Governor's Proclamation Breakfast at the 2017 Missouri Interpreters Conference

two. Well the one changed my world and gave me the ability to feel comfortable in group conversations and even put my employees on notice, they had to watch what they were saying as "the boss" now had bionic ears. It was because of this change in my life that I gained the confidence and the ability to follow up on my lifelong dream of running for public office and now seven years later, I'd like to believe it's been an amazing fit for me. I hope to continue in public service in whatever roll God opens up for me.

It was a true blessing to attend the interpreters conference and to see a little inside the life struggles of those that have so much more to deal with day in and day out. It also made me want to work for a solution to help make hearing assistant technologies more available for those in need.

Rep. Mike Kelley, a Republican, represents Barton, Dade, part of Jasper and part of Cedar Counties (District 127) in the Missouri House of Representatives.

Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing **LEGISLATIVE DAY** At The Missouri State Capitol February 21, 2018

Join MCDHH to show your support of the many issues legislators are considering that impact our community, including language assessment, hearing aid financial assistance, and movie captioning. This event will include remarks from legislators and community leaders, informational booths, and meetings with your representatives. A full schedule will be announced before the event.

MCDHH is currently looking for volunteer interpreters, organizations, and service providers to help coordinate this event. Email MCDHH@mcdhh.mo.gov if you are interested in getting involved.

Request special accommodations by
January 31 by emailing
MCDHH@mcdhh.mo.gov.



Legislative Initiatives for Missouri's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

Senator Jeanie Riddle, District 10



For the upcoming 2018 legislative session, there are many worthy legislative pursuits to benefit the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. As the Senator whose district includes the Missouri School for the Deaf, I know the importance of the Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) among those that are affected by hearing loss.

In recent years, the General Assembly passed legislation to create a program to help assist the deaf-blind population and their support service providers, now we must continue the goal of funding this program so that the MCDHH can assist those most in need. A support service provider is a vital part of a deaf-blind person's everyday life, and we should do what we can as a state to help those individuals be functional members of society.

Other important legislation to follow this upcoming year is the continuing work towards a statewide language assessment program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. Delay in language development can have a negative, long-term impact on a child's learning, and we must examine this issue and find a path forward.

An issue I worked on last year is something that will be pursued again this year, finding the funds for hearing-aid assistance for low-income individuals. While low-income loans exist to aide in hearing aide procurement, many folks still cannot afford those payments. Someone who is losing, or has lost a significant portion of their hearing can find it hard to maintain employment or important relationships. Assisting these individuals who

don't have the means to acquire hearing aids, can help them return to a life they were more accustomed to and be productive members of society.

There will be many other worthwhile legislative initiatives in the upcoming session that will improve the lives of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, and all Missourians. It is important to identify and fill the gaps in services that are needed to live a productive, satisfying life. By working together, we can continue to improve the lives of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

Jeanie Riddle, a Republican, represents the 10th Senatorial District, which includes Audrain, Callaway, Lincoln, Monroe, Montgomery, and Warren Counties.

2018 Legislative Priorities



Join Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for a discussion of the legislative issues we plan to work on this year. Learn which topics we'll be focused on, how the legislative process works, and how you can get involved!

<p>Saturday, January 6 11 am-1 pm</p>  <p>25 E. Frisco Ave. Webster Groves, MO</p>	<p>Tuesday, January 9 1-3 pm</p>  <p>3710 Main St. Kansas City, MO</p>	<p>Saturday, January 27 10 am-12 pm</p>  <p>Burton Building #006 1 University Ave. Fulton, MO</p>	<p>These workshops will also include a 30 minute presentation from the Missouri Commission on Human Rights about fair housing.</p>
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RSVP to Christopher.Ludvigsen@mcdhh.mo.gov

These events will be rescheduled if canceled due to weather.

Missouri SSP Program

Grants Awarded to Beyond Interpreting, DEAF, Inc.

The two organizations that will be carrying out the Missouri SSP Program through June 30, 2018 are Beyond Interpreting and DEAF, Inc.

Beyond Interpreting is an interpreting agency based in St. Joseph that was established in Spring 2017. Not your average interpreting agency, they plan to offer a wider variety of services and develop new community building programs. Beyond Interpreting will be the organization responsible for the Missouri SSP Program in the Northwestern region of the state. Counties included in the Northwestern region are: Andrew, Atchison, Bates, Benton, Buchanan, Caldwell, Cass, Clay, Clinton, Daviess, DeKalb, Gentry, Harrison, Henry, Holt, Jackson, Johnson, Lafayette, Nodaway, Pettis, Platte, Ray, and Worth.

DEAF, Inc. is a nonprofit organization based in the St. Louis area whose mission is to empower, raise awareness, and bridge a sustainable foundation of communication and equal access to the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and hearing communities. They will be coordinating all aspects of the Missouri SSP Program in all areas of the state except for the Northwestern region.

Phases of the Program

The Missouri SSP Program is divided into three phases to ensure the highest quality of services for DeafBlind individuals.

The first phase is train-the-trainer sessions. The individuals that will be serving as trainers from each of the grantee organizations will come together to be trained by De Linda Brite, the executive director of DeafConnect of the Mid-South, Inc. De Linda's extensive experience working as an SSP, conducting trainings, advocating for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities, and many leadership roles make her a valuable resource for establishing a baseline of knowledge and techniques for our program.

DeafBlind: having some combination of vision and hearing loss; dual sensory loss comes with unique challenges that are not necessarily associated with deafness or blindness alone

SSP: a Support Service Provider is an individual whose role is to act as "the eyes and ears" of a DeafBlind person in order to empower them to lead an independent life

The second phase is to train the individuals that will be involved in the delivery of support services. It is in this phase that SSPs will be trained by the individuals that participated in the train-the-trainer sessions so that they know the proper techniques and responsibilities of the job. This phase also includes training for the DeafBlind individuals that will be utilizing the services. The curriculum will ensure that SSPs and DeafBlind clients have the same expectations of their roles in the relationship and empower self-directed decision-making.

The final phase is the part of the program everyone has been waiting for: support services! Trained SSPs will provide services for trained DeafBlind individuals, and the SSPs will be compensated in return. The structure of service delivery and compensation may vary from region to region across the state.

First Train-The-Trainer Session

MCDHH hosted the first train-the-trainer session for the Missouri SSP Program November 29-30, 2017. Participants included three trainers from DEAF, Inc. and five from Beyond Interpreting, two of which are DeafBlind.

The bulk of the training consisted of a presentation and guided discussion led by De Linda Brite. The agenda included the history of the MO SSP Program, the purpose and expectations of an SSP, and DeafBlind culture and techniques. Additionally, the participants learned best practices for passing this information along to future trainees in the program.



The half-day reserved for hands-on training truly made the session challenging and unique. Training participants had to role play in a variety of scenarios, both as an SSP and as a DeafBlind person. Opaque glasses were used to simulate blindness. The first task was to pick out items from a catered lunch display while simulating DeafBlindness with the support of an SSP, then switch roles with each other. Things got a little sticky when one participant accidentally dunked his hand in ranch dressing! The hands-on activities increased in difficulty until the group went to a state office building and mastered guiding techniques on stairs, escalators, and revolving doors.

This initial cohort of trainers is now armed with the skills and knowledge to develop SSPs and orient DeafBlind consumers. They will act as the foundation from which the program grows moving forward. The next group of train-the-trainer session will take place in January 2018 in order to expand the pool of trainers.

Next Steps

Funding for the MO SSP Program is appropriated to MCDHH on an annual basis by the Legislature and the Governor. Using data and stories from DEAF, Inc.



and Beyond Interpreting, MCDHH will advocate for continued funding into the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

If you are interested in becoming an SSP or are DeafBlind and would like to apply for services, contact the organization that serves your area.

Beyond Interpreting: April Merino-Brammell, aprilmbbi@gmail.com
DEAF, Inc.: Info online at www.deafinc.org/dbssp.html

EVENT RECAP: Missouri Interpreters Conference & Deaf and Hard of Hearing Empowerment Symposium

In honor of reuniting our annual Deaf and Hard of Hearing Empowerment Symposium with the Missouri Interpreters Conference, the shared theme for the events was “Come Together.” Several special events and sessions served as celebrations of the coming together of interpreters and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community.

Conference mealtimes were used as opportunities to recognize individuals that epitomize the spirit of collaboration and hard work that benefit Deaf and Hard of Hearing Missourians. At the Governor’s Proclamation Breakfast honoring Missouri Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Day, the following individuals were awarded:

Representative Mike Kelley
Come Together Award

Geneva Shearburn
Lifetime Achievement Award

Dr. Barbara Garrett
Passionate Educator Award

The following individuals were recognized at the Come Together Luncheon:

Senator Jeanie Riddle
Come Together Award

Scott Dollar
Breaking Through Barriers Award

Dr. Thomas Horejcs
Advocate of the Year Award

Two new interactive sessions were added to the Interpreters Conference for the purpose of encouraging discussion, building vocabulary, and viewing situations from new perspectives. Friday night featured presenters from organizations in the fields of emergency preparedness, medical, and first response. The rotation-style event was packed with more than 100 attendees, including interpreters, Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals.

Many participants wrapped up their conference experience by attending the vocabulary speed dating session on Saturday night.

Attendees were challenged to communicate a variety of specialized words—ranging from medical terms, to farm equipment, to astrological jargon—to each other without using the words themselves. This silent activity encouraged participants to exercise their skills in expanding concepts and communicating deeper meanings.

The featured speaker for the Empowerment Symposium was Melissa



Representative Mike Kelley, Dr. Barbara Garrett, and Geneva Shearburn pose with their awards after the ceremony at the Governor’s Proclamation Breakfast.



A small group discusses what they experienced and learned from the Vocabulary Speed Dating session.

Draganac-Hawk, the President of the National Association of the Deaf. Her message focused on collaboration—both nationally and locally, and within the Deaf Community and with other organizations—in order to advance shared goals. Draganac-Hawk also co-presented with MCDHH Executive Director Opeoluwa Sotonwa for an afternoon session of Conversations Across Missouri (CAM), which highlighted issues such as the relationship between law enforcement and the Deaf Community.

Look forward to seeing the spirit of “Come Together” continue into MCDHH’s 2018 events. The Missouri Interpreters Conference will be celebrating its Silver Jubilee. The theme for the 2018 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Empowerment Symposium will be “The Criminal Justice System and the Challenge of Communication Access.” Mark your calendars for October 19-21, 2018, and we will see you at the Lodge of the Four Seasons in Lake Ozark, MO!



Mark Your Calendar! For Upcoming MCDHH Events

- January -

- 1: New Year’s Day - MCDHH Office Closed
- 6: Legislative Priorities Presentation
@ DEAF, Inc.
- 9: Legislative Priorities Presentation
@ The Whole Person
- 15: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - MCDHH Office Closed
- 27: Legislative Priorities Presentation
@ William Woods University

- February -

- 1: Commission Meeting
- 12: Lincoln Day (observed) - MCDHH Office Closed
- 19: Washington’s Birthday - MCDHH Office Closed
- 21: Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Legislative Day @ Missouri State Capitol

- March -

- 13: Disability Rights Legislative Day
@ Missouri State Capitol
- 29: Commission Meeting

Staff Spotlight:
Congratulations to MCDHH
Interpreter Certification
Specialist, Jessica Brown, on
becoming the first MO-CDI
certified interpreter!





**Missouri Commission for the
Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

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Jefferson City, MO 65109



MCDHH Staff

**Left to Right: AJ
Housewright, Jessica
Brown, Dee Sanfilippo,
Opeoluwa Sotonwa,
Emily Morrison, Laurie
Lister, Christopher
Ludvigsen**

**Looking for ways to support Missouri's 600,000 Deaf
and Hard of Hearing citizens?**

**Send an email to MCDHH@mcdhh.mo.gov to discuss ways you can
contribute to the Commission's mission to improve the lives and
opportunities of Missourians with hearing loss.**