



# Tennessee Council for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing

2023 Annual Report

Tennessee Department of Human Services  
Division of Rehabilitation Services  
505 Deaderick Street, Nashville, TN 37243



The Tennessee Council for the Deaf, DeafBlind & 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, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing exists to serve as an advocate, provision of direct support, and culturally appropriate services affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing has the statutory responsibility to:

1. Advocate for services affecting people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing in Tennessee;
4. Provide for a mutual exchange of ideas and information that impact people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing;
7. Authorize the Tennessee Council for the Deaf, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.

## July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023 Report

### ***Major Activities***

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

- Revised new county distribution plan to improve services in previously underserved counties, particularly in the East Tennessee region. As a result,

activities, events, outreach and advocacy efforts were provided extensively to individuals who were previously unable to access services.

- Completed a statewide needs assessment by collaborating with customers who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing and grantee Directors. As part of this needs assessment process, the Council Executive Director attended town hall meetings around the state to hear from Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing consumers. Additionally, the Executive Director and the Sensory Area Director sponsored a series of meetings in each region to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback regarding their needs and service provision.
- Worked with former grantee Knoxville Center of the Deaf to develop a plan to reinstate the Center with partial grant support in exchange for the provision of services for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing customers throughout 12 counties in East Tennessee. This partnership resulted in a new grant contract for the 2024 fiscal year.
- Executive Director attended a National Leadership Summit for individuals in similar positions from across the United States. This summit resulted in networking with other states to provide information on how meetings are conducted, best practices in service provision, and the ability to discuss current issues affecting the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities across the nation.
- Provided extensive self-advocacy training for those who are Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing, businesses, families of those who are Deaf, DeafBlind, 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 advocate for effective communication, whether that be on-site interpreters or video remote interpreting at local hospitals.

- The Mental Health Task Force, a TCDDDBHH sponsored initiative, continued to meet throughout the year to address the needs of people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing and trying to access mental health and substance abuse assistance. The task force involved Council Members, representatives from the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities, sign language interpreters, and mental health and substance abuse treatment providers. As a result of these collaborations, the Mental Health Task Force developed a training that was offered to providers across the state. Trainings addressed the unique needs of people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing in both inpatient and outpatient mental health settings.
- As a direct result of the work of the Mental Health Task Force, TAMHO, the trade association that represents the Tennessee Community Mental Health centers, sponsored one Tennessee sign language interpreter at the Mental Health Interpreter Training in Alabama. The funding for this sponsorship was provided by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, which strengthened the partnership between the Council and stakeholders in the mental health arena.
- Following the passage of legislation to allow American Sign Language to be offered as a foreign language for credit in secondary schools in Tennessee, TCDDDBHH members and leadership advocated for the establishment of these programs throughout the state. As a result, the Hamilton County Department of Education established a dual enrollment program with Chattanooga State to offer ASL for high school students.
- Provided information for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing people by attending various community events and conferences on behalf of the Tennessee Department of Human Services and TCDDDBHH. The Council s represented at a variety of in-person and virtual events including those sponsored by the Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness, the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association conference, the Tennessee DeafBlind Project, the Tennessee Organization of the DeafBlind, Hearing Loss Association of America, and the Deaf Literacy Initiative.
- The Executive Director 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; Serving Customers Who Are DeafBlind; and Self Advocacy for Youth. Workshops were delivered both in-person and virtually.

- 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. Throughout the past year, services have been improved and the goal of reducing wait time for interpreters to arrive at hospitals, emergency rooms, courtrooms, and police stations has been met. Additionally, a presence in this region has strengthened services such as job placement, social work, advocacy, educational workshops, and assistive technology training for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community in Cookeville/Crossville area.
- In an effort to provide increased outreach to stakeholders across the state, TCDDDBHH sponsored vendor booths at the Tennessee Statewide Conference sponsored by the Tennessee School for the Deaf and Community Fest events sponsored by Bridges for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing . At these events, the Executive Director was able to explain the work of the Council and increase awareness of the Council.
- TCDDDBHH continued to review ways to improve access to alerts and updates for people who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing. Collaborating with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency Council representative, the Executive Director worked to ensure that text-to-911 services are available in all counties throughout Tennessee. This service has been mandated and will be available in every county by 2024.
- Most grantees exceeded their benchmarks for their state contracts. The Executive Director monitored each grantee monthly and provided feedback to each Center Director. Any deficits were addressed with the appropriate Center Director.
- TCDDDBHH continued to meet both in person and virtually throughout the year. The Council continued to utilize a hybrid platform in order to provide access to

visitors who are unable to travel to Nashville for the meetings. All meetings had 30+ attendees including statewide community members, resulting in full access to visitors who could not attend the meetings in person.

- Council representative from the Tennessee Department of Safety worked with Bridges for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to establish Access on Demand interpreting services to make DMV locations accessible for Deaf customers in Middle TN.
- Provided sponsorship for the Tennessee Statewide Conference which focused on deaf education, advocacy, family learning and educational interpreting.
- Executive Director established “Coffee with the Council” which provided an opportunity to get feedback from the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities. In fiscal year 2024, this event will be held quarterly across the state.
- All vacancies on the Council were filled and the Council is now complete with eighteen members.

### ***Community Centers for the Deaf, DeafBlind, 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.

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 five (5) regional community centers to provide:

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

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

<b>Performance Based Services</b>	<b>Performance Metrics</b>
Outreach and Referral	2259 Contacts
American Sign Language Interpreting Services (Pro Bono)	2149 Pro Bono Interpreting Hours
Client Advocacy for Deaf, DeafBlind, & Hard of Hearing	1611 Advocacy Services Provided
Educational Workshops and Training	613 Hours
Activities, Events and Social Media Participation	182 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:

<b>MEMBER NAME</b>	<b>ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION</b>
John McMahon	Tennessee Department of Education – Tennessee School for the Deaf
Tiffany Kelley	Tennessee Department of Human Services
Holli Allen	Tennessee Department of Health



Austin Nichols	Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services
Mariena Terry	Deaf Consumer Representative
Carolyn Mitchell	Hard of Hearing Consumer Representative
Carl Sherard	Deaf Consumer Representative
Meredith Bailey	Hard of Hearing Consumer Representative
John Johnson	DeafBlind 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
Randall Haggard	Tennessee Association of the Deaf
Amanda Dockery	Hearing Loss Association of America
Megan Potts	Tennessee Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
Tiffany Ramsey	Tennessee Department of Human Services
Robin Beamon	Tennessee Department of Safety & Homeland Security

***TCDDDBHH Statewide Goals/Plans:***

- Currently, there are no facilities that provide mental and behavioral health services specifically to the Deaf, DeafBlind, 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 and implemented to assist mental health providers in working with patients who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.
- Currently, 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 have provided support and training to Deaf persons who are interested in becoming a Deaf Interpreter/Certified Deaf Interpreter. The Knoxville Center for the Deaf hosted a training for Deaf individuals wanting to become CDIs as well as for hearing interpreters who want to learn the skills necessary to work with a CDI. Currently, there are four Deaf people interested in taking the national certification test. Successful completion of this test would quadruple the number of CDIs across the state of Tennessee. TCDDDBHH plans to continue to provide and support this training on how to utilize such interpreters in a variety of settings when necessary. Additionally, research and networking have provided the information necessary for a CDI to be added to the interpreting team for meetings in 2024.

- 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. Licensure attempts were put on hold during/after the Covid pandemic, but have been revived this year. If passed, licensure will allow for more qualified, professional sign language interpreters, deaf interpreters, and tactile interpreters to serve persons who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.
- TCDDDBHH plans to continue the work previously established to improve emergency services impacting the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing communities. The goal is to provide education to the Deaf, DeafBlind 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, DeafBlind, 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 Knoxville Center of the Deaf to improve community services in Knoxville and surrounding areas. The Council's goal is to improve services including advocacy and outreach. Additionally, a presence in this region will strengthen services such as job placement, social work,

educational workshops, and assistive technology training for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community in Knoxville and surrounding areas.

- 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, DeafBlind, 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, DeafBlind, 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>