

Office of Rehabilitation Amendments, House Bill 325 and Its Impact on the Division of Services of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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During the 2016 legislative session, the bill called ‘Office of Rehabilitation Amendments, House Bill 325’ was enacted. In this new law, the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR), which includes the Division of Services of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH), was

moved under the Department of Workforce Service (DWS). This was proposed due to an audit made the year before of USOR which revealed that the Vocational Rehabilitation program spent 6 million over what was budget, millions of money was lost, money was not managed appropriately.

The Board of Education who managed USOR voted to have USOR governance removed. It was decided that USOR need to be managed by another department that can offer more support.



Back L-R: David Samuelsen, Philipp Montalette, Stephen Persinger, Joseph Nelson Front L-R: Catherine Holt, Pamela Mower

During the proposal being made during the legislation session, the Utah Association of the Deaf (UAD) board members contributed a lot of time participating in the legislative process to ensure protection of the DSDHH services. Those, actively involved were Stephen Persinger, Philippe Montalette, Pamela Mower and David

Samuelsen. They also worked closely with Representative Norm Thurston (HB 325 Sponsor) to ensure the appropriate words and phrases be revised on the HB 325 (Persinger, *UAD Bulletin*, April 2016).

Before HB 325 was enacted, Marilyn Call, a director of the Division of Services of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, explained that the managing agency for USOR was changed during the legislative session from the Board of Education to Department of



Marilyn Call

Workforce Services (DWS) under the Governor's Office. Utah Association of the Association and the Utah Deaf community objected to this change throughout the legislative process and brought up many fears and concerns which needed to be addressed. Despite the strong testimonies shared in appropriation committee meeting, a representative from the Governor's Office said a stand-alone agency for USOR under the Governor's Office would not be allowed. Shortly after, the House Bill 325 was introduced. The sponsors were

Representative Norm Thurston and Senator Allen Christensen (Call, *DSDHH Newsletter*, April 2016). This bill impacted the DSDHH. DSDHH staff and UAD board members had no other choice but to work with sponsors on the bill to protect the Sanderson Community Center services for the Deaf and hard of hearing population in Utah.

The first version of HB 325 was quite alarming. Marilyn Call noted, "It left out the Interpreter Certification Program and it appeared to get rid of Division Directors and Divisions and consolidate all of the Divisions of USOR together in one office under Darin Brush" (Call, *DSDHH Newsletter*, April 2016, p. 1). UAD advocates intervened and made it clear that they could not support the bill unless the Sanderson Community

Center and its services were protected. The bill was revised twice. The second version of HB 325 added protections for DSDHH and its two centers in Taylorsville and St. George (Call, *DSDHH Newsletter*, April 2016). Some of the changes to the bill were:

- The ‘hearing impaired’ term was replaced with ‘deaf’ and/or ‘hard of hearing’ in most of the bill.
- The Division of Services of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will be called a Division (before it would have been changed to Office of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing).
- In the old version, the director of DSDHH was not included. It now says assistant director (change from director to assistant director).
- Responsibility to appoint four professional interpreters to the Interpreter Certification Board will be kept with the Director of DSDHH (Persinger, *UAD Bulletin*, April 2016, p. 2).

Another protection from UAD advocates was to ask that the State audit committee review how DSDHH is doing after one year of being under the governance of DSW. This should occur after

October 2017.

Marilyn Call

observed that ‘it was a wild roller coaster ride this session.’

She was certain that the former

advocates, who have passed away, were

happy to see the younger advocates

work so effectively together to protect DSDHH, its purpose and services (Call, *DSDHH Newsletter*, April 2016).



Back LR: Marilyn Call, David Samuelsen, Philippe Montalette, Pamela Mower, Stephen Persinger, Rep. Norm Thurston, Kent McGregor Front: Utah Governor Gary Herbert

Bibliography

Call, Marilyn. Legislative Session 2016. *DSDHH Newsletter*, April 2016.

Persinger, Stephen. Legislative Session – HB 325. *UAD Bulletin*, April 2016,