

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES  
OCTOBER 20, 2008  
MINUTES**

**Location:** First Floor Conference Room  
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA

**Members Present:** Paul O'Hanlon, Chairperson, Katherine D. Seelman, Co-chair, Janet Evans, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Sarah Goldstein, Rich McGann, James C. Noschese, Jeff Parker, John Tague

**Members Absent:** Aurelia Carter, Linda Dickerson

**Others Present:** Holly Dick, Victoria Campbell, Dee Delaney, Nathan Eber Val Gawlas, Carol Horowitz, Dianne Gallagher, Charles Keenan, Linda Lee, Danielle Lengle, Pam Maciejewski, Kim Mathos, Richard Meritzer, Charles Morrison, Teresa Nellans, Michelle Poonessa, Terry Reynolds, Tamara Siegert, Joseph Wassermann

The meeting was called to order by Mr. O'Hanlon at 1:04 PM.

**INTRODUCTIONS:**

Everyone introduced themselves. Mr. O'Hanlon read the agenda.

**FINANCIAL REPORT:**

The Treasurer presented the Financial Report. A motion to APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORT was made by Mr. Parker. It was seconded by Mr. Noschese. The motion passed unanimously.

**MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS:**

The August and September minutes were presented. Ms. Evans moved to ACCEPT THE AUGUST MINUTES. Mr. Parker seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously. Mr. Henderson moved to ACCEPT THE SEPTEMBER MINUTES. Mr. McGann seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously. Ms. Evan pointed out the only five Task Force members attended the September meeting. Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out the only motion made was the approval of the minutes. They took no other action because they might not have a quorum.

**PRESENTATION FROM THE DEAF, DEAFBLIND AND HARD OF HEARING  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TASK FORCE ON THE IDENTIFICATION CARD SYSTEM**

Pam Maciejewski reported the Behavioral health Task Force set up a sub committee to develop and identification card. She is deaf and has problems with communication. They have been working on this project since June of 2007. Now we have to educate doctors and medical workers about the card. They developed a template and have a link on a Web page. If you want to change the card you can edit it on the computer. The next step is a statewide program. They also want to educate everyone in Pittsburgh about this card. They have two partners in the project, Community Care and the Center for hearing and Deaf services. Both have offered to put the link on their website. When you get to the card on the computer you click on options and then choose the communication option(s) you prefer and enter your emergency contact's information. Then click on create card. The information will be on the front of the card and the ADA Law will be on the back.

Mr. Tague asked if there was consideration given to making it broader in accommodation. What about people who were just blind? Mr. McGann pointed out that this card is for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing because the reason for the card is communication issues. Mr. Noschese added this card is the first step. It can be broadened. They welcome anyone's suggestions. They don't know the needs of the blind community. Dr. Seelman asked if Ms. Nellans has been involved in this program. Ms. Maciejewski said she had. She gave feedback for the hard of hearing community and Mr. McGann gave feedback for the deafblind community. Mr. Henderson asked if other states have done a card like this. Ms. Maciejewski said she does not know. Mr. McGann added Dr. Mathos got information from other states that have systems like this.

Ms. Maciejewski then said they were also developing a website, but it was not operating yet. Carol Horowitz said they could add additional accommodations, but they may need another host. Mr. Meritzer pointed out that the City ADA Web Page is hosting the Allegheny Intermediate Unit's Easter Seals Project report and could host other Disability related functions. Ms. Goldstein said the Governor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities Web page could also host this function. Mr. Noschese added there will be a link at the bottom of the card for people to get additional help. Ms. Maciejewski responded they would need to find a location on the card for additional accommodations. They could be added on the back. Mr. McGann added three points: (1) It is very important to have a discussion with the police and 911 staff. (2) We need to push the state to add this information to the magnetic strip on their ID cards. (3) There may be a problem if people are using the card daily and the police may not understand their communication needs. He related a story about the police entering a room and startling the inhabitant because no one could arouse him.

Mr. Parker asked since several members of the Task Force were involved, could the Task Force endorse this program. Dr. Seelman responded if these constituencies are behind it we should endorse it. To broaden the card an organization would need to pick this up. This is not the role of the City / County Task Force. It is a profound thing not to be able to communicate. Mr. Noschese asked how the project was funded. Ms. Maciejewski replied the Staunton Farms Foundation. Ms. Horowitz added another organization would need to take over. They would need to have focus groups. The hard part is the drop down menu. The funding came from the Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing Behavioral Task Force and the Staunton Farms Foundation. There would need to be additional funding. Mr. O'Hanlon reminded everyone that this is a communication tool. People who are blind may not have this issue but other groups, such as stroke victims, do. It is mostly for on the spot communication. Ms. Goldstein suggested they call it a communication card.

Dr. Seelman added it meets a need to broaden it. Mr. McGann thanked Ms. Maciejewski and Ms. Poonessa for their great job.

## **HOSPITAL COMPLIANCE PROJECT**

Linda Lee reported that there were three handouts on the back table, a proposal and two sets of questionnaires. In the summer of 2007 Leslie Cooke wrote a report based on questionnaires to hospitals and members of the deaf and hard of hearing communities. This last spring Michelle Corkum met with two of the three hospital systems in the City. We are now reassessing the hospitals to see if they have improved. Both Ms. Nellans and Mr. Noschese helped draft the questionnaires. She is trying to have the survey done on-line. She sent out emails to get responses. She wants the responses limited to Allegheny County. So far only three people have filled out the questionnaire. She printed hard copies for the people who do not have internet access. She also sent updated questionnaires to the hospital systems. She also wants to do some shadowing of patients who were going to hospitals for test and see how it goes as an observer. No one has responded to this request yet. She would like to present her results at the next meeting.

Mr. Noschese pointed out he is President of the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Pennsylvania Society for the Deaf and they are meeting on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. McGann added he is a member of the Advisory Board under the Center for hearing and Deaf Services. They discuss issues of services. They are trying to set up a time to meet. He recommended she talk with Mike Bobonic with the deafblind community regarding what had happened at Mercy Hospital.

Ms. Lee then reported she is also working on a project with the Center for Hearing and Deaf Services to expand coverage to interpreting services for out patient services and doctors' appointments. Gateway, Highmark, UPMC and Health America have all agreed to meet and discuss this subject.

Mr. O'Hanlon Pointed out that it is the malpractice insurance that will pay if they are sued. He feels we are talking to the wrong insurance companies. Mr. McGann added that Pennsylvania Act #57 requires that interpreters be certified. Some hospitals have contracts with Deaftalk. That system can shut down and some of their interpreters are not certified. Dianne Gallagher responded that Act #57 requires certified interpreters, but if a certified interpreter is not available they can use one that is not certified. Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that if we are trying to identify patients going to hospital appointments we can request the information from Access or the interpreting services. Is there a confidentiality issue? Ms Gallagher said there would be a confidentiality issue. There visits are confidential. Hospitals could give this information out. Ms. Nellans said she will bring the surveys to her groups. People who have hearing problems don't like to call new people because of equipment issues. They should go through her.

Mr. McGann moved TO INVITE SOMEONE FROM PA RELAY SERVICE AND VIDEO RELAY SERVICE TO EXPLAIN HOW THEIR SERVICES WORK. When you call you get machines and leave messages that are returned. Mr. O'Hanlon asked that he make this a suggestion. We may want more discussion on this issue. It is worth looking at. Mr. Henderson said this was a good suggestion, but we need other people at the meeting. We don't work with those agencies. Mr. Noschese agreed it was a good suggestion, but this is the wrong place. We should have a hospital workshop. This room is too small. Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out the Mr. McGann agrees.

Dr. Seelman said it has been very frustrating to get hold of the communications issues. There are no pressure points we have found yet. Usually we can find them. She challenged all the Task Force members to help find these pressure points. Mr. O'Hanlon said we should continue to try to get more survey data.

### **DISCUSSION ABOUT PORT AUTHORITY**

Mr. O'Hanlon reported Public Transit is in crisis. The Union is working under a contract that expired June 30<sup>th</sup>. The County is withholding tax revenues to try to get a new contract. Non-negotiable items are changes in retirement and lifetime healthcare programs. If a compromise is not reached by December Port Authority will shut down. We have no information about Access.

Holly Dick further reported Access operates independently and can continue to operate. They will do their best to meet people's needs. They will try to serve people with disabilities who do not qualify for the service. They will set priority for trips (work, medical appointments, daycare). They will also arraign pre-scheduled food market trips in off peak hours.

Mr. Parker added what we were preparing for was a bus drivers' strike. But if the system shuts down due to lack of money that will affect Access differently. Ms. Dick pointed out the Lottery money would still be coming to the program. Mr. Henderson added there is State money coming as well. Mr. O'Hanlon responded the State money requires a local match. Ms. Dick added if the local match is withheld, the State money will not be provided. Mr. Wassermann clarified that the local match does not affect the lottery money. Mr. Henderson asked how much State money is available. Mr. O'Hanlon said \$280 million.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked do you have sense of how Access can absorb eligible bus riders. Ms. Dick replied they did not know how many people we are talking about. Mr. McGann pointed out that we have had town hall meetings previously with County Executive Onorato. He should be part of this discussion. Mr. O'Hanlon asked who we should invite to the November meeting. He doesn't see how Access could continue for riders under 65 years of age. Mr. Noschese said this labor issue between Port Authority and the County has nothing to do with us. We should not be involved. Dr. Seelman countered we have a responsibly to maintain transportation for our constituencies. School systems have small transportation systems that are unused during off-peak hours. We should strategize about November.

Mr. Henderson said the bigger picture is the State money. We should be working with the Governor to keep the money flowing. Mr. Parker added we support public transportation and the County provides it. We supported the drink tax. It is being collected but not being used. In the past the State continued the flow of funds until the County provided the match. This time the County is saying there will be no match. We need to take a position. We want funding to continue. The County Executive has met with us in the past. Mr. Henderson said the money is there. The State has the money and the State should keep the money flowing. Mr. O'Hanlon responded this is an artificial crisis being created. The state has been asked to keep out. Ms. Goldstein summarized that money has been earmarked for a Port Authority match. The County has excess money. They are withholding the money.

Mr. McGann said we have met with County Executive Onorato two times and have never heard the outcomes of those meetings. We need to prepare so we can get concrete answers. Access is very important. County Executive Onorato should be at the next meeting. Mr. Noschese moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES SEND A LETTER TO COUNTY EXECUTIVE ONORATO STATING THAT BUS SERVICE SHOULD CONTINUE DURING THE STRIKE FOR HEALTH REASONS. Mr. O'Hanlon said there is no strike. Dr. Seelman said upon the occasion of the strike what is the emergency plan. Who can give us the best answer from the County? This will make people with disabilities prisoners should this occur. We can do a number of things. Ms. Evans agreed with Mr. Henderson. The money should be provided. We have not heard from people who use Access to go to church and other activities. What about people who use Access for shopping. Ms. Dick responded Access is preparing for this. Ms. Evans agreed the Task Force should meet with County Executive Onorato. Mr. Parker said people with disabilities use the bus. Mr. O'Hanlon asked should we invite him to the next meeting or have a separate meeting. Should we invite Karen Hoesch to the next meeting? Mr. Henderson responded if County Executive Onorato schedule is filled we should meet with him when we can. Dr. Seelman moved THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH / ALLEGHENY COUNTY TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES CONTACT COUNTY EXECUTIVE ONORATO FOR AN APPOINTMENT AND ASK SOMEONE FROM HIS OFFICE TO COME TO THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING. Mr. Henderson seconded the motion. Mr. Parker added Karen Hoesch should also be on the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

## **STAFF REPORTS**

Mr. Meritzer reported he had set up two meetings. The Visitability Marketing Committee meeting has been set for November 12<sup>th</sup>. And he has worked with the Center for Hearing and Deaf Services to have the Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing Workshop for November 15<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Seelman asked about the cost for the workshop. Mr. Meritzer said as far as he knows there are no expenses. The Center for Hearing and Deaf Services is donating the space and the interpreters and everyone will bring or pay for their own lunch. Dianne Gallagher confirmed that Ken Puckett will provide the captioning services. Ms. Nellans pointed out that was the date of the next meeting of the Hearing Loss Association. There was discussion regarding the focus of the workshop, which would be the Convention Center and the Airport. Mr. McGann suggested this be put on hold until after the 15<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Parker said we have responsibilities for Authorities. We can focus our concerns on the Convention Center and Airport Authority.

[Note, based on the conflict noted above, this workshop was postponed to a later date.]

## **TASK FORCE UPDATES**

Mr. O'Hanlon reminded the members that we still have not had our Annual Meeting for this year. There was consensus to put this on hold.

## **VOX POP**

Dr. Seelman reminded everybody about the Thornburgh Family Lecture Series on October 30<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. The speaker is I. King Jordan who is a great civil rights leader.

Dr. Seelman Thanked everyone connected to the new brochure, particularly Ms. Healy.

Mr. Seelman moved the meeting to be adjourned. Mr. Evans seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 P.M.

**THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:**

**DATE:** November 17, 2008  
**TIME:** 1:00 P.M.  
**LOCATION:** Large Conference Room  
200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219