

# 2018-20 Executive Progress Report

Commonwealth of Virginia  
Secretary of Health and Human Resources  
Department for the Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing

## At A Glance

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) promotes accessible communication so that persons who are Deaf and hard of hearing may fully participate in programs, services and opportunities throughout the Commonwealth.

Staffing 10 Salaried Employees, 0 Contracted Employees, 11 Authorized, and 4 Wage Employees.

Financials Budget FY 2019, \$4.27 million, 23.41% from the General Fund.

Trends Legend ↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease, → Steady

Key Perf Areas → Interpreter Requests Filled  
Productivity → TAP: Average Cost per Participant  
Legend ↑ Improving, ↓ Worsening, → Maintaining

For more information on administrative key, and productivity measures, go to [www.vaperforms.virginia.gov](http://www.vaperforms.virginia.gov)

## Background and History

### Agency Background Statement

The programs and services of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH), authorized in Chapter 13 of Title 51.5 of the Code of Virginia, ensure that the agency's focus remains on communications access for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind. VDDHH works with consumers, state and local agencies, Virginia Courts, and the private sector to achieve consistent and effective communication through training, technology, telecommunications access and through the provision of qualified sign language interpreters.

### Major Products and Services

VDDHH fulfills its mission and meets the needs of consumers, state and local government agencies, and Virginia Courts through the provision of the following programs and services:

Interpreter Programs, includes the Interpreter Service Program (ISP), coordinating sign language interpreters and real-time captioning (CART) for state agencies, the legislature, and, Virginia courts; maintaining the Directory of Qualified Interpreters, providing direct access to qualified interpreters across the state; and, The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) and the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), offering diagnostic skills assessments to sign language interpreters for community and classroom assignments. VDDHH contracts with qualified sign language interpreters and VQAS raters in order to operate these programs.

The Technology Assistance Program (TAP), provides specialized telecommunications equipment to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or speech disabled.

Community Services offers training, information and referral, and technical assistance across the Commonwealth. The Community Services program provides awareness activities on a wide range of topics with the goal of increasing understanding and awareness of the cultural and communication issues affecting Virginians who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind. The VDDHH website and social media platforms represent a significant opportunity for disseminating relevant and timely information.

Virginia Relay oversight, ensures effective and efficient operation of Telecommunications Relay Services in the Commonwealth. Virginia Relay is a federally-mandated telecommunications relay service for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or speech-disabled. It allows these individuals to use specialized telecommunication equipment or features to communicate with standard telephone users.

## Customers

### Customer Summary

VDDHH is aware of several trends which impact both the make-up of our customer base and our ability to provide coverage for each customer group. The agency expects to continue to see growth in the number of older Virginians who experience hearing loss seeking services. This customer base is increasingly "tech savvy," and the agency will need to continually update the technology in our programs to meet the needs of this group. The percentage of customers we serve who are hard of hearing is expected to stabilize at or near current levels and this customer group will continue to represent the majority of those served. In addition, this customer group actively seeks assistance from the agency in identifying financial aid resources for the purchase of hearing aids.

Culturally Deaf Virginians (those who are native signers of American Sign Language with strong ties to the Deaf Community) comprise a key customer group as well. This customer group looks to VDDHH to be a highly-visible agency on issues affecting communications access, within the executive, judicial and legislative branches of Virginia government.

Another segment of the population that will likely continue to seek our services is the growing number of veterans. As hearing loss is the most prevalent disability of returning armed forces personnel, VDDHH will continue to reach out to returning soldiers and expects to see a steady increase in services in this area.

VDDHH also recognizes sign language interpreters as a key customer group as these individuals seek both credentials and opportunities for interpreting assignments through the agency.

State agencies and Virginia courts are yet another critical customer group, seeking both direct services (specifically interpreter services) and consultative services (staff training and technical assistance in meeting the needs of Virginians who are deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind.)

### Customer Table

Predefined Group	User Defined Group	Number Served Annually	Potential Number of Annual Customers	Projected Customer Trend
Consumer	Consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing (assumes 1 consumer in each completed interpreter request)	1,525	800,000	Stable
Communication	Interpreters Seeking Credentials (Participated in FY19/Registered in Program History)	236	4,045	Stable
Consumer	Callers requesting Technical Assistance with Technology (not unduplicated count)	5,579	800,000	Increase
Consumer	Virginia Relay Users	26,708	800,000	Stable
Consumer	Technology Assistance Program (TAP) recipients (through FY19/3rd quarter)	298	800,000	Increase

## Finance and Performance Management

### Finance

#### Financial Summary

Funding for the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) is primarily composed of general and special funds. General funds support the community services, interpreter, and administrative programs of the agency. The remaining appropriations are special funds for the provision and oversight of the federally-mandated telecommunications relay service as well as the related equipment distribution program and related TAP Specialists. The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening program receives an annual award of up to \$100,000 from a federal special education grant through the Virginia Department of Education and also receives a small annual special fund appropriation for the receipt and expenditure of candidate registration fees.

It is not feasible to compare funding for VDDHH programs and services with those offered by Deaf Services Agencies in other states. The scope and structure of services provided by these agencies across the nation varies greatly.

#### Fund Sources

Fund Code	Fund Name	FY 2019	FY 2020
01000	General Fund	\$998,570	\$998,570
02751	Vddhh Special Revenue Fund	\$3,167,208	\$3,167,208
10000	Federal Trust	\$100,000	\$100,000

#### Revenue Summary

VDDHH receives funds collected from the Communications Sales and Use Tax in order to maintain contracts for telecommunications relay services and to provide telecommunications related equipment to qualified applicants through the Technology Assistance Program (TAP). Additional revenue for miscellaneous services is collected from candidate fees for participation in the Virginia Quality Assurance Program. These fees cover only a portion of the actual cost of administration of the assessments.

**Performance**

**Performance Highlights**

VDDHH has one key performance measure which relates to the critical communication access issue of the provision of sign language interpreters for state agencies and Virginia courts. The bar is set high for this measure. The agency consistently fills more than 96% of all requests, though, in some cases, requests are rescheduled to ensure coverage. To ensure that such a high fill-rate is achieved, the agency maintains contact with qualified interpreters who are on contract and with non-contracted interpreters as well. In addition, private interpreter referral agencies are sometimes used to fill assignments. The current contract for interpreter services includes a rate differential for services provided in localities in Northern Virginia. As of June 28, 2019, sixty-eight (68) interpreters are on contract with the agency across the Commonwealth. No new contracts have been awarded in the past year as the agency has prepared to move from the contract to a service agreement model. The agency also has a list of 40 freelance interpreters and 4 private interpreter referral agencies who can provide qualified interpreters for court and court-related assignments. There are 7 CART providers on the VDDHH contact list, including both agencies and individuals.

The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) continues to meet the needs of interpreters seeking credentials, particularly for those who work in public schools. The agency continues to offer the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a credential recognized by the Virginia Department of Education. Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Performance Assessment results continue to be sent to candidates well ahead of the required 90 working day deadline. For the past several years, the average time from assessment date to results has been under 75 working days and in the 3rd quarter of Fiscal Year 2019, average time for results was 69 working days. To ensure this level of performance, the agency monitors the performance of the contracted raters who complete the scoring on the assessments and provides re-standardization training as indicated.

In the Technology Service Area, Virginia Relay continues to meet or exceed Federal standards for call answer rate. In Fiscal Year 2018, 97.45% of all calls were answered in less than 10 seconds. Data for customer satisfaction in the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) is incomplete for FY19 due to program changes and administrative/postal issues.

**Selected Measures**

Measure ID	Measure	Alternative Name	Estimated Trend
751.0007	Percentage of all Sign Language Interpreter and CART services requests filled.	Interpreter Requests Filled	Maintaining
751.0006	The average cost of equipment provided per participant in the Technology Assistance Program.	TAP: Average Cost per Participant	Maintaining

**Key Risk Factors**

VDDHH faces a number of challenges which may limit our ability to satisfy expectations and achieve our mission.

The number of key staff who are at or beyond retirement eligibility remains a concern. The agency has 10 full-time employees (including an at-will) with a 11th position to be filled within the year. Three of those employees are currently eligible for full retirement and a fourth has more than 20 years of service and is over 65 years old. The agency is fortunate to have an experienced staff with excellent credentials. Targeted recruitment and selection of new staff to replace those who retire will be critical.

Consumer expectations of the agency remain high. As advances in technology enhance the opportunities for communications access, both our traditional customer base (including culturally Deaf Virginians) and emerging customer groups (non-native American Sign Language Users who require specialized interpreting services, aging Baby Boomers who are technologically savvy and returning veterans who experience service-related hearing loss) will look to VDDHH to provide access to those technologies.

In the Interpreter Services Program, due to competitive private sector opportunities in the video relay industry paying competitive salaries with benefits, VDDHH is faced with fewer interpreters who choose to contract with the agency. The Supreme Court of Virginia has agreed to allow VDDHH to enter into service agreements with private agencies on their behalf to fill open and after hours assignments. The risk in that is the loss of control over interpreter selection. In identifying private agencies, VDDHH has focused on those with extensive experience in providing sign language interpreter services as opposed to those whose expertise is primarily in spoken language services.

The agency must be prepared respond to the changing landscape which includes the provision of services through video remote interpreting (VRI) as an optional delivery modality. While VRI may be appropriate in some situations, VDDHH must provide guidance to state agencies and courts on the limitations of this model. In addition, as more consumers with minimal language skills, often because they are non-native American Sign Language users, interact with state agencies and Virginia courts, the challenge of locating interpreters who can establish effective communication increases. Often in such situations, a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI – a deaf individual with training and certification as a relay interpreter) is

recommended. Unfortunately, outside of the Northern Virginia area, there are no Certified Deaf Interpreters in the Commonwealth.

There continues to be a lack of general awareness about the unique service needs, particularly communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities look to VDDHH to be both a model of access and a promoter of the same. This lack of general awareness is not limited to the private sector. State agencies are often unprepared to serve members of the public who are deaf or hard of hearing, both because of a lack of communications access and a deeper lack of understanding of the unique service needs of these consumers. Deaf Virginians have noted the lack of public spaces identified as "Deaf Friendly" and are seeking to develop "bricks and mortar" facilities that both provide an array of state and local government services and serve as an identifiable icon for the general population about the communication and culture of the Deaf Community.

In the legislative arena, the Joint Commission on Health Care (JCHC) has been tasked with studying language achievement milestones for young children who are deaf. The community supported initiative, prompted by a national movement known as LEAD-K, could involve VDDHH in the development and implementation of a wide range of activities in early intervention, including a Deaf Mentoring program for parents. VDDHH must be prepared to effectively implement any resulting programs and services.

## Agency Statistics

### Statistics Summary

The following statistics highlight the extensive efforts of VDDHH to maximize the impact of services. In most cases, these statistics remain stable, however, it must be noted that, as access to high-speed internet expands, the number of traditional relay calls will show a decline as callers turn to internet-based relay services which are unreported to VDDHH.

The Technology Assistance Program has been in a period of transition over the past two years. Device distribution figures are down as the demand for the traditional devices offered has decreased. Distribution reported here is for the first three quarters of FY2019.

### Statistics Table

Description	Value
TAP Devices Distributed (through FY19/3rd Quarter)	442
Traditional Relay Calls (Norton Center)	165,237
CapTel Relay Calls	361,998
Interpreter Services Requests	1,525
VQAS Written Assessments	131
VQAS Performance Assessments	178

## Management Discussion

### General Information About Ongoing Status of Agency

Over the past year, VDDHH has welcomed a new Director and several new staff members. Program areas have been slightly restructured to better respond to the service needs. The focus for VDDHH programs and services must remain on communications access. The following initiatives over the next biennium will be critical to the agency's success:

A new Telecommunications Relay Service contract shifting the agency from separate contracts for Traditional Relay Service and Captioned Telephone Service to a single contract that provides both.

A request for proposals for Technology Assistance Program (TAP) specialists will also be issued. This proposal will replace the previous Outreach Services contracts which included more generalized activities. New contracts will address TAP services only.

In response to the ongoing concerns of consumers who are unable to attain access in health care settings, VDDHH continues to pursue a multi-faceted approach to increase the provision of qualified interpreters in health care in Virginia. The Statewide Interagency Team (comprising agencies providing direct services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Virginians) is exploring the concept of an Interpreter Pool Fund as a mechanism to increase communication access in private legal and health care settings.

To further ensure the availability of qualified interpreters in a wide range of environments, VDDHH must ensure that VQAS maintains its position as a valid and reliable assessment. To do this, the agency launched a new, standardized VQAS Performance version in 2018 and expects to launch a second new version in late 2019 or early 2020. Outreach Services are challenged by repeated reductions in funding or shifts in funding which result in an increased focus on activities related to Virginia Relay and the Telecommunications Assistance Program. The agency must continue to seek ways to maximize access to technology and training with limited resources.

### Information Technology

VDDHH is a member of the Disability Services Agency (DSA) group with IT planning coordinated by the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative

Services (DARS). In-scope IT services are provided by VITA/NG. Oversight of in-scope services and “out of scope” IT services and management are provided by IT staff located at DARS. IT projects are planned and implemented across all of the Disability Services Agencies, under the leadership of DARS. In addition to the broader IT projects, VDDHH has successfully transitioned to a new SQL database for the Interpreter Services Program (ISP).

### **Workforce Development**

The nature of services provided by VDDHH makes it critical that the agency consider two separate sets of workforce skills. First, the agency must consider the administrative/management/technical/customer service skills necessary to do the job. These include computer skills, written and oral communication skills, office technology skills, organizational skills, and interpersonal skills. In every instance though, the agency must also consider a second set of workforce skills: those related to providing services to and working in an environment with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. This skill set includes sign language skills, knowledge of deaf culture, disability-specific technology skills (e.g. Relay and TTY use). Each position in the agency is evaluated for the degree to which an individual entering that position must have this second, unique set of skills. Some positions require only minimal familiarity upon hire while others require in-depth knowledge and understanding. The agency generally experiences low turnover, however, at least 3 current employees (including two program managers) are eligible for full retirement. Succession planning will be continue to be a focus over the next two years to ensure continuity of operations. Targeted recruitment has proven helpful in identifying qualified candidates who bring the necessary skill set to the agency but, with limited turnover, opportunities for recruitment are rare.

### **Physical Plant**

VDDHH currently participates in the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) lease of office space in the Forest Office Park. This lease, which be up for renewal in 2023, provides the agency with sufficient accessible space for the current needs.

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