

# 2018-20 Strategic Plan

## Department for the Deaf and Hard-Of-Hearing [751]

### Mission

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.

### Vision

The vision of VDDHH is a Commonwealth where persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened or deafblind can fully participate in all aspects of life without barriers to communication.

### Values

### Finance

#### Financial Overview

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 majority of total appropriations are Special Funds for the provision and oversight of the federally-mandated telecommunications relay service as well as the related equipment distribution program. The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program receives up to \$100,000 annually in appropriation for a federal special education grant. The program also receives a small annual Special Fund appropriation for the receipt and expenditure of VQAS candidate registration fees.

#### Biennial Budget

	2019 General Fund	2019 Nongeneral Fund	2020 General Fund	2020 Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	998,570	3,267,208	998,570	3,267,208
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

*(Changes to Initial Appropriation will be 0 when the plan is created. They will change when the plan is updated mid-biennium.)*

### Customers

#### Anticipated Changes to Customer Base

**Virginia Relay Users:** The number of relay calls handled by Virginia Relay has steadily declined since 2004 as relay users migrate toward internet-based telecommunication relay services such as Internet-protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP-CTS), Internet-protocol Relay (IP-Relay) and Video Relay Services (VRS) proliferate. The actual number of users of all relay services continues to increase as this newer technology allows individuals to satisfy their communication needs. For example, native signers of American Sign Language (ASL) may be expected to more actively use internet-based Video Relay Service (VRS) rather than the text-based, primarily English language-based relay. Virginia-specific data for the number of users of these internet-based relay services is confidentially reported to the FCC and is not available to VDDHH.

**Technology Assistance Program (TAP) Recipients:** The population base in the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) continues to shift as more persons who are hard of hearing, veterans and older Virginians, learn about and participate in the program. While this trend is expected to continue, a shift to mobile device distribution could be expected to result in a spike in the number of Deaf applicants receiving equipment as well.

**Interpreters Seeking Credentials:** The number of interpreters seeking credentials through the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Program (VQAS) should remain stable. It is possible that, as candidates choose to take both the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) and the VQAS Performance Assessment, the actual number of assessments administered may rise slightly.

**Consumers who are Deaf Or Hard of Hearing (Interpreter Services):** The overall number of requests processed (and thus customers reported) in Interpreter Services is down from the previous plan period. This reflects the elimination of VCU Health Systems requests since that organization hired a full time staff interpreter/coordinator. The agency does expect to see a continued increase in the number of foreign sign language users who seek services from the agency, particularly those who require interpreter services. This is primarily reflected in the number of courts seeking interpreters of foreign sign languages other than ASL (e.g. Mexican Sign Language).

#### Current Customer List

Predefined	User Defined Group	Number	Potential Number of	Projected
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Group		Served Annually	Annual Customers	Customer Trend
Communication	Interpreters Seeking Credentials (Participated in FY19/Registered in Program History)	238	3,458	Stable
Consumer	Callers requesting information and referral on niche topics (not unduplicated count)	21,209	800,000	Increase
Consumer	ISP Consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing (not unduplicated count - assumes 1 consumer in each completed interpreter/CART request)	1,525	800,000	Stable
Consumer	Technology Assistance Program (TAP) recipients	816	800,000	Increase
Consumer	Virginia Relay Users (unduplicated phone numbers using VA Relay)	26,708	800,000	Stable
General Assembly	Legislators	140	140	Stable
State Agency(s)	State Agencies	66	113	Increase
State Agency(s)	Virginia Courts	158	184	Stable
Taxpayer	Advisory Board Members	9	9	Stable

## Partners

Name	Description
Virginia Relay Provider	VDDHH contract with a relay provider to provide telecommunications relay service under contract with the state
Qualified Sign Language Interpreters/CART Providers	VDDHH enters into agreements with qualified interpreters to provide interpreting services for state agencies and Virginia Courts.
TAP Providers	VDDHH contracts with local agencies to provide assessment, training, technical assistance, and other services on a local or regional basis. These contractors also serve as the primary point of contact for the agency's Technology Assistance Program, assessing technology needs, delivering and troubleshooting equipment to program participants.
Technology Vendors	Provide new assistive technology and state-of-the-art telecommunication equipment for testing, evaluation, and possible acceptance as TAP equipment offerings.
Raters and Diagnosticians	VDDHH contracts with qualified individuals to provide rating services (reviewing and scoring VQAS candidate performance assessments) and detailed diagnostic analysis.
Statewide Interagency Team Members (SIT)	VDDHH leads a team of representatives from the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) and the Community Services Boards (CSBs) to address cross-agency concerns about services provided to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind.

## Agency Goals

- **Enhance the quality of communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing in Virginia by increasing the availability and effectiveness of and consumer access to assistive technology and technology services.**

### Summary and Alignment

Technology presents the greatest opportunity for communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. With widespread access to and awareness of effective technology, Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing will be able to improve their economic standing, achieve higher levels of educational attainment, and maintain a higher sense of safety, security, and independence.

### Objectives

- » **Provide the citizens of the Commonwealth with access to appropriate and effective telecommunications relay services and specialized assistive technology.**

#### Description

The Technology Programs Service Area is composed of two programs providing access to telecommunication services and related assistive technology for Virginia citizens. The first program, Virginia Relay, is a federally-mandated telecommunications relay service for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or who have difficulty speaking. As the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) certified relay oversight agency for the Commonwealth, the agency submits separate monthly, semiannual, and annual reports on usage and performance data. The current FCC relay service standard requirement is 85% of all incoming calls be answered in 10 seconds. The second of these two programs is the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) that provides technical and financial assistance for adaptive communications devices to persons with a hearing loss or speech disability. The processes for application and receipt of equipment are

managed on a loan-to-own (L2O) basis, where an approved applicant receives equipment on a 30-day trial basis. VDDHH continues to offer relaxed TAP program qualifications for Virginia Veterans with documentation of an honorable discharge. L2O continues to be an effective and efficient process and includes a survey instrument to measure the effectiveness of the equipment received as well as the recipient's level of satisfaction with the program.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Release a Request for Proposals to establish a single contract to provide both traditional relay service (TRS) and captioned telephone service (CTS).
- Monitor relay provider performance on a daily basis for both the traditional relay service (TRS) and captioned telephone service (CTS) to ensure contractual compliance with federal requirements and minimum standards.
- Report relay contractor performance and relay user complaints to the FCC on an annual basis to maintain VDDHH's FCC certification as the Commonwealth's relay oversight agency.
- Release a Request for Proposals and award new contracts for Technology Assistance Program providers.
- Expand current TAP equipment offerings to include wireless/mobile devices in recognition of customer preferences and cost effectiveness.
- Distribute TAP Customer Satisfaction Survey to document the satisfaction level of recipients with equipment's ability to improve telecommunications access.
- Provide VDDHH TAP contractors and staff with semi-annual updates and training on both relay changes and TAP revisions and initiatives.
- Conduct annual consumer focus groups to evaluate new technology for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, and late-deafened, using feedback to make decisions on adding new technology and devices to the TAP program.
- Expand marketing of VDDHH Technology Programs to audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and hearing aid dealers.
- In cooperation with Hamilton Relay's Heroes with Hearing Loss program, renew marketing efforts targeting Veterans with a hearing or speech loss.

#### *Measures*

- ◆ The average cost of equipment provided per participant in the Technology Assistance Program.

### • **Increase the availability, quality and utilization interpreters and Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) providers.**

#### **Summary and Alignment**

With adequate training opportunities and enhanced Quality Assurance Screening access, sign language interpreters in Virginia should be able to meet the demand for services in a changing marketplace (including video relay, remote interpreting and traditional interpreting situations). In addition, with increased community and agency awareness of the levels of participation which can be achieved with appropriate utilization of interpreters and Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) providers, consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing should be able to access employment, community activities, health care, education, and a wide array of other public and private activities.

#### **Objectives**

- » **Increase the pool of qualified interpreters available to fill assignments coordinated by VDDHH.**

#### *Description*

The number of certified and qualified interpreters who provide services in state and local agencies, while rising, is still lower than hoped for. This objective seeks to identify opportunities to increase the number of interpreters available to work with state and local agencies and the number who will accept court assignments.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Working with the Department of General Services, Division of Purchase and Supply (DPS) and with the VDDHH Buyer at the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), shift from a contract-based approach to a shared agency agreement approach to assist agencies in securing sign language interpreter services.
- Annually, contact all Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certified interpreters in the Commonwealth to encourage them to participate in the shared agency agreement offered by VDDHH or to be included on the email distribution list of non-participating interpreters for times when a contracted interpreter is not available.

- Encourage all Virginia Quality Assurance Screening candidates who achieve a level II or higher to participate in the shared agency agreement.
- Work with the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia (OES) to update the current Memorandum of Understanding and to establish agreements with private interpreter coordination agencies for services after hours and when freelance interpreters are not available for assignments.
- Work with the OES to provide training on the Virginia Court system and basic procedures for providing court interpreting services in the Commonwealth.
- Identify specific, expanded training and certification documentation parameters for sign language interpreters who provide services under both the VDDHH Service agreement for state and local government services and the Memorandum of Understanding with the Supreme Court of Virginia.

#### Measures

- ◆ Percentage of all Sign Language Interpreter and CART services requests filled.

### » **Ensure and improve the validity, reliability and efficiency of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Process.**

#### *Description*

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) provides the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program for sign language interpreters and cued speech transliterators. This program consists of the Written Assessment which must be passed at a 90% rate before a candidate may participate in the Performance Assessment. Performance Assessments are reviewed by trained "raters" who score the performance based on strict criteria and further reviewed by a qualified diagnostician who provides detailed diagnostic feedback on areas of strength and weakness, along with suggestions for improvement. This objective seeks to continue review and improvement of the VQAS System and ensure the ongoing validity and reliability of the VQAS.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Increase the pool of questions available for the Written assessment to ensure test variation;
- Increase the number of Performance Assessment materials available by filming new segments, conducting standardization training and field testing.
- Recruit and train more raters and diagnosticians
- Document clear selection, training and performance criteria for raters and diagnosticians.

#### Measures

- ◆ Percentage of returning Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Candidates whose survey responses indicate they used feedback from their Diagnostic Feedback Report to improve their Performance Assessment Scores.

### • **Strive for recognition of communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing as a core component of all services provided by agencies of the Commonwealth.**

#### **Summary and Alignment**

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) is authorized, in the Code of Virginia, to provide a framework of consultation and cooperation among agencies and institutions serving people who are deaf or hard of hearing and to monitor and evaluate the provision of services to this population. While the agency has done this through participation in interagency workgroups and policy reviews upon request, there is an increasing call from consumers for assistance in achieving acceptable levels of access in a broad range of government services and VDDHH must actively inform and assist all state agencies and their local counterparts in understanding and meeting the service needs of these consumers.

#### **Objectives**

### » **Increase access in all state agencies for Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing.**

#### *Description*

Many state agencies have limited experience making their programs and services accessible for Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing. This objective strives to improve access statewide by increasing the role of VDDHH in securing the services of qualified sign language interpreters or CART providers and in providing training and technical assistance on both a macro and micro level to state agencies.

#### *Objective Strategies*

- Pursue an Executive Order from the Governor to direct VDDHH to develop and distribute guidance documents for all state agencies related to communications access and to designate VDDHH Interpreter Services Program as the first point of contact for any sign

language interpreter or CART services needs.

- Explore options for making training modules related to communications access, cultural awareness and other issues related to providing services to Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing available in the Learning Center for all state employees.

#### Measures

- **Serve as a recognized and reliable source of current information from state/national resources provided to all customers through a variety of means.**

#### Summary and Alignment

With a wide and diverse customer base seeking current and critical information, the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing must be prepared to serve as an up-to-date and reliable resource providing information in a variety of formats and through a range of channels, including training programs, the Internet, with attention to social media, and others.

#### Objectives

- » **Expand access to information on resources related to a wide variety of topics affecting persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, their families and the professionals who serve them.**

#### Description

The Community Services Program is responsible for providing meaningful and current information to the citizens of the Commonwealth, state and local government agencies, and the private sector. This is achieved through workshops, information and referral services, social media and the VDDHH website.

#### Objective Strategies

- Routinely and systematically review website content and layout to ensure accuracy and relevance of information presented.
- Standardize training materials to ensure consistent presentation and delivery across all regions of the state.
- Use social media regularly and responsibly to promote critical information about VDDHH, partner agencies and related community activities.

#### Measures

## 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.

## 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.

## Staffing

Authorized Maximum Employment Level (MEL)	11
Salaried Employees	10
Wage Employees	4
Contracted Employees	0

## 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.

## 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).

### Estimate of Technology Funding Needs

### 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.

## Supporting Documents

Title	File Type
State Interagency Team Needs Assessment Executive Summary	MS Word Document
VDDHH Organizational Chart	MS Word Document

**Technology Services for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing [45004]**

**Description of this Program / Service Area**

This service area provides access to telecommunication services and assistive technology for Virginia citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or who have difficulty speaking. The service area comprises two agency programs, Virginia Relay and the Technology Assistance Program (TAP). Direct services include:

- Oversight of federally-mandated Telecommunication Relay Service;
- Administration of the Commonwealth’s Telecommunications Relay Service contracts;
- Distribution of assistive technology equipment to qualified applicants; and
- Technical assistance for and demonstration of devices for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-disabled.

**Mission Alignment**

This service area directly aligns with the agency's mission of promoting accessible communication through the use of technology services. Technology services remove barriers to telecommunications by providing relay services and specialized equipment.

**Products and Services**

**Description of Major Products and Services**

Technology Assistance Program (TAP) – The VDDHH equipment distribution program (TAP) provides assistive technology, primarily for telecommunications purposes, to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired either at no cost or a discounted cost. Eligibility is based on verification of disability, income, and residency. There are no age restrictions. After pre-screening, qualified applicants are loaned equipment for a period of 30 days to evaluate its ability to restore communications access; if successful, the equipment is assigned to the applicant. Devices available include text telephones (TTYs), large print TTYs, amplified telephones, Voice Carry Over and captioned telephones, Hearing Carry Over telephones, and visual, tactile, and audible signalers. In addition, special order equipment is available on a case-by-case basis. Access is provided by qualified regional TAP Specialist who contract with the agency.

Virginia Relay Oversight - Virginia Code § 51.5-115 establishes VDDHH as the oversight agency for the operation of telecommunications relay services in the Commonwealth. Currently, oversight responsibilities are for legacy relay services including those for persons with a speech disability. Since the original Code language was written, internet-based technology has mushroomed and many new relay services are now available. These services, including but not limited to internet-protocol relay (IP Relay), video relay service (VRS), Spanish relay, and real-time text (RTT), are now readily available to deaf and hard of hearing citizens nationwide. These new services are currently provided by emergent national relay providers and are largely supported by a federal interstate TRS fund. While VDDHH retains Code authority for the oversight of telecommunication relay services such as TTY-based and captioned telephone relay services, consumers consider the agency as a primary resource for information, referral, equipment and training on all types of relay services, including those provided through the internet.

Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC) - The Council assists VDDHH with the oversight of the current relay contracts and serves as a consumer-based focus group for development and testing of new relay features and services. Expenses for VRAC meetings are supported by Special Funds. The success of the VRAC has been due in large part to the diversity of its membership and their representation of a cross-section of relay users. Council members include representatives from the Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD), a Virginia Chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), the Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA), the Virginia Association of Deaf Blind (VADB), a Center for Independent Living (CIL), and the Speech and Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV). Council members also include a captioned telephone relay user, a user of Speech to Speech relay, a Video Relay user, an internet-relay user, and two hearing individuals that regularly use Virginia Relay. In addition to these members, representatives from VDDHH and the current relay contractors also participate in the Council meetings as non-voting members. VRAC members and the groups they represent serve as the principal source of consumer feedback on relay service quality, development of new features, and technical assistance activities.

Products / Services					
Product / Service	Statutory Authority	Regulatory Authority	Required Or Discretionary	GF	NGF
Technology Assistance Program	VA Code § 51.5-112.8	22VAC20-20	Required	0	500,000
Virginia Relay Oversight (including Advisory Council)	VA Code§ 51.5-115	47CFR64.604	Required	0	387,591

**Anticipated Changes**

Technology Assistance Program (TAP)

A key change was implemented in FY18 as the agency separated TAP services from Outreach Services, which is known as Community Services. This change will result in a clear delineation between TAP Services and Community Services. The Technology Assistance Program includes assessment of new equipment, equipment purchases, inventory, and distribution. TAP Specialists provide client services including application

assistance; telecommunication needs assessment; equipment delivery & installation in clients' homes; training on how to use the equipment and make calls, and how to use telecommunication relay services.

As disability-related apps for tablets become more technically sophisticated and more prevalent in the marketplace, an increasing number of state equipment distribution programs are moving to replace many of their traditionally offered devices with tablets or smart phones. Basic tablets with preloaded relay and assistive communication apps can also provide cost savings over analog TTYs, speech boards, and other augmentative equipment. VDDHH will be consulting with equipment distribution programs in other states in an effort to identify best practices that can be adopted by TAP. VDDHH has also consulted with VITA procurement staff to ensure that preloaded tablets can be procured directly for TAP.

#### Virginia Relay

In 2012, Virginia Relay began offering Speech to Speech (STS) relay services with a video-assist option for persons who have severe difficulty speaking over the phone. This enhanced form of STS enables the communications assistant to use visual cues and facial expressions to increase understanding and overall success of the call. Since 2016, Virginia has been one of the most successful STS relay programs in the nation, with STS call volumes exceeding any state currently served by Hamilton Relay.

In January 2016, Virginia Relay began offering Relay Conference Captioning (RCC) enabling persons to participate in conference calls or join business meetings by phone. In contrast to a traditional relay operator who types a portion of the relay call, RCC uses Computer Assisted Real Time (CART) staff to provide text in real time on a tablet or PC. RCC has proved extremely popular and effective for conference calls in business and employment settings.

VDDHH through VITA has maintained separate contracts for telecommunication relay service (TRS) and captioned telephone service (CTS) contracts through the Spring of 2020. A new Request for Proposal (RFP) for a single contract to combine both services into one contract is planned for early FY 2020.

### **Factors Impacting**

#### Technology Assistance Program (TAP)

Many of the devices provided through TAP are designed to operate on traditional, analog phone services. More and more individuals, businesses, and other locations are upgrading their phone service to bundled, internet or server-based high-speed lines. This is particularly true in assistive-living or skilled nursing facilities. Consumers are often confused by this issue and it complicates the appropriate selection of equipment from the TAP. In response to the concerns of state equipment programs and national consumer groups, the Federal Communications Commission is currently investigating this incompatibility issue. In addition, as use of mobile technology continues outpace static devices, consumer demand for mobile devices has increased. Traditional TAP equipment, specifically TTYs, no longer satisfy the telecommunication needs for most deaf people.

#### Virginia Relay

In December 2016, the Federal Communication Commission adopted a Report and Order regarding Real Time Text (RTT) as an eventual replacement for TTYs and a possible successor for basic TTY to Voice Relay Services. Specifically, the Report and Order permits wireless service providers and handset manufacturers to support RTT in lieu of TTY technology; ensures RTT users will be able to call 911 for emergency services and 711 for relay services; defines RTT to be interoperable across networks and devices and backward compatible with TTYs; and establishes a phased rollout of RTT for wireless networks from December 31, 2017 to June 2021. Once implemented, anyone with an internet-enabled wireless device with RTT will be able to directly connect to and communicate in real time with a TTY user. While RTT will not replace all forms of relay calls, it will have a significant impact on the current telecommunication relay services currently overseen by states.

The Federal Communication Commission has also indicated its intent to seek transfer of the administrative and a portion of the financial responsibilities of internet-based captioned telephone relay services (IPCTS) to states. While no time line or cost impact has currently been established by the FCC, most states and IPCTS providers agree such transfer may occur within the next several years.

### **Financial Overview**

Of the Non-General Funds for VDDHH Technology Programs in FY 19, \$2,648,260 is appropriated for the administration, oversight, and contracted operations of Virginia Relay. The remaining \$500,000 is appropriated for the administration and distribution of related assistive technology and specialized telecommunication equipment.

#### Biennial Budget

	2019 General Fund	2019 Nongeneral Fund	2020 General Fund	2020 Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	0	3,148,260	0	3,148,260
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

### **Supporting Documents**

Title	File Type
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**Consumer, Interpreter, and Community Support Services [45005]**

**Description of this Program / Service Area**

This service area provides communication access and community support services for Virginia citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, their families and the professionals who serve them. The service area is composed of three agency programs: Interpreter Services; Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS), and Community Services. Direct services include:

- Scheduling of qualified sign language interpreters for courts and state agencies,
- Maintenance and distribution of the Virginia Directory of Qualified Interpreters, both on-line and in print,
- An assessment and diagnostics program for the evaluation of the skill level of sign language interpreters,
- Training for consumers about how to access services and for state and local agencies about how to effectively interact with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and
- Responding to requests for information and referral on niche topics pertinent to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Mission Alignment**

This service area directly aligns with the agency’s mission of promoting accessible communication through community and interpreter services. These services remove barriers to government by providing interpreter services, expanding the interpreter pool and providing technical assistance.

**Products and Services**

**Description of Major Products and Services**

Virginia Quality Assurance Screening – VDDHH provides Quality Assurance Screening for sign language interpreters and cued speech transliterators. This program consists of the Written Assessment which must be passed before a candidate may participate in the Performance Assessment. Performance Assessments are reviewed by trained “raters” who score the performance based on strict criteria and further reviewed by a qualified diagnostician who provides detailed diagnostic feedback on areas of strength and weakness, along with suggestions for improvement. Since 2012, VQAS has also been an authorized administrator of the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a national assessment accepted by the Virginia Department of Education as a credential for classroom interpreters.

Interpreter Services – VDDHH coordinates requests for interpreter services and Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) from state agencies and courts. The agency is transitioning from a contract for interpreter services to a statewide service, which will be available to all state and local government entities. The agency also maintains a Memorandum of Understanding with the Supreme Court of Virginia to provide services in courts across the state. In statewide and local emergency situations, the Department provides Emergency Management officials with information about interpreters available to assist in shelters and other critical areas.

Directory of Qualified Interpreters – VDDHH publishes a Directory of Qualified Interpreters which provides contact information on interpreters who meet or exceed the Code definition of “qualified interpreter.” This directory is available to assist businesses, nonprofits and agencies in locating qualified interpreters for events or appointments involving consumers who are deaf.

Community Services – The Community Services program is an integral part of all other VDDHH programs. Community Services staff are often the first point of contact for the public.

- Training – Training is a component of every Service Area at VDDHH. Provided primarily through Community Services staff, topics include use of assistive technology, how to use and acquire a qualified sign language interpreter, availability of services from other state and local agencies, and appropriate procedures in an emergency or law enforcement situation. Other topics include adapting to hearing loss, understanding educational options and services, learning sign language, as well as conducting specialized trainings to police, courts, and Public Safety Answering Points (9-1-1 dispatchers). Additionally, Community Services promote public awareness via a variety of outreach activities, including booths at health fairs, transition (high school to higher education or employment) or community-sponsored events, and presentations to civic groups and schools.
- Information and Referral – VDDHH responds to requests for information and referral to connect residents, agencies and businesses with resources on niche topics related to deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Individualized Assistance – VDDHH staff provide assistance to deaf and hard of hearing consumers who are having difficulty resolving issues as a direct result of their hearing loss, usually due to a lack of communications access. Issues addressed might include housing, employment, healthcare, legal, and other daily living challenges.

Products / Services					
Product / Service	Statutory Authority	Regulatory Authority	Required Or Discretionary	GF	NGF
Virginia Quality Assurance Screening	VA Code § 51.5-113.	22VAC20-30	Required	123,079	118,948
Interpreter Services Program	VA Code § 51.5-113.	22VAC20-30	Required	137,000	0

Community Services	VA Code § 51.5-112.1 through 4	Required	314,000	0
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### **Anticipated Changes**

Ongoing efforts to enhance the administration of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program will include the development and implementation of new assessment materials. One full set of materials will be launched in FY20 after being field tested and standardized in FY18. In addition, standards for rater selection and training will be developed and implemented with at least one cadre of new raters (Deaf, Hearing, or Certified Interpreter) trained each year.

The key change anticipated in Interpreter Services is the implementation of the Interpreter Services Agreement that will replace the current contract. This will increase the availability of qualified interpreters for state agencies while maintaining the current control over costs. The agency must continue to explore options for providing guidelines for agencies and courts regarding the provision of interpreting services via remote access, either through the use of broadband or, for courts, ISDN video connections. Also, it is expected that the program will continue to receive requests for interpreters for non-native American Sign Language Users.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Supreme Court of Virginia for the provision of communications access in courts, updated in August 2018, will be updated annually. The FY20 update is expected to include the addition of guidelines for establishing agreements with private interpreter agencies and empowering VDDHH staff to approve lodging for interpreters traveling long distance.

### **Factors Impacting**

At the request of the VDDHH Advisory Board, the Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation will be conducting a study on the need for the regulation of the profession of sign language interpreting in the Commonwealth. VDDHH will provide technical assistance and serve as a resource to DPOR in this study, which may take several months to complete. If the result of the study is a recommendation for licensure, the Interpreter Services Program would be significantly impacted.

Among the most critical assignments coordinated in the Interpreter Services Program are requests from Virginia Courts. The availability of highly qualified court interpreters varies significantly across the state and, in some areas, interpreters with the most appropriate certification for critical court cases must travel two hours or more each way in order to provide services. The addition of agreements by VDDHH (on behalf of the Supreme Court) with private interpreter referral agencies should result in improved access.

In recent years, there has been an increase in requests for Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs - native Deaf American Sign Language users trained and certified as relay interpreters). With only a few CDIs in the Commonwealth, such requests create a challenge.

Concern over access to effective communication in health care remains high among Virginians who are deaf or hard of hearing. VDDHH is challenged to respond to consumers who seek assistance in addressing these issues. Health care providers are often unaware of the effective communication provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and equally unaware of how to secure the services of a qualified sign language interpreter. Usually health care providers are reluctant to commit the funds. Recent efforts to promote the concept of a communication access fund as a solution have been unproductive.

The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program is most significantly impacted by the Department of Education's (DOE) Special Education regulations, which establish VQAS Level III as the minimum professional standard for educational interpreters. Educational interpreters comprise as much as 90% of the candidate pool in VQAS and many of these individuals do not have the skill level necessary to meet the standard. Recognizing that nearly 90% of VQAS candidates have been educational interpreters, the Department of Education provides grant funding to support the VQAS program. In addition, VDDHH has become a test administrator for the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), a national assessment for educational interpreters also recognized by DOE. The addition of the EIPA option has not significantly impacted the number of individuals taking the VQAS Performance Assessment. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) is seeking additional test administrators for its' certification program and VDDHH is exploring this option.

As we enter FY20, VDDHH Community Services is exploring the feasibility of three specific opportunities with other Health and Human Resources agencies, organizations and community partners. These activities include:

- The Support Service Provider workgroup - Support service providers (SSPs) relay visual and environmental information, act as sighted guides and facilitate communication for people who are deafblind, using the deafblind person's preferred language and communication mode. This multi-agency workgroup is exploring feasibility of providing SSPs in the Commonwealth.
- A Deaf Resource Center workgroup - A group of community leaders has asked VDDHH to work with them to explore the feasibility of building or purchasing a Community Center to house a wide range of programs, services and technology for the deaf or hard of hearing.
- Deaf Mentors Program - As a member of the Virginia Interagency Coordinating Council for Early Intervention (Part C), VDDHH is in early discussions with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) about the feasibility of developing a program to connect the hearing parents of deaf children identified as deaf with adult Deaf Mentors who may be able to provide them information and guidance as they learn about communication and educational options for their children.

### **Financial Overview**

Of the total annual General Fund Appropriations, \$314,473 provides support for Community Services (formerly VDDHH Outreach), \$167,399 provides support for the Interpreter Services program, with the remaining \$123,079 for the administration of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) program. VQAS also receives up to \$18,948 in Special Revenue Appropriations for the receipt and expenditure of candidate

registration fees, as well as up to \$100,000 Federal Appropriation for the administration of a federal IDEA grant for the rating and diagnostics of sign language interpreters/candidates.

Biennial Budget

	<b>2019 General Fund</b>	<b>2019 Nongeneral Fund</b>	<b>2020 General Fund</b>	<b>2020 Nongeneral Fund</b>
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	604,951	118,948	604,951	118,948
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

**Supporting Documents**

<b>Title</b>	<b>File Type</b>
Memorandum Of Understanding with the Supreme Court of Virginia	MS Word Document
Interpreter Services Contract (through December 2015)	MS Word Document

**Administrative Services [45006]**

**Description of this Program / Service Area**

This service area provides oversight, and administrative and operational support to all of the agency’s programs and services as well as support for the Advisory Board. This includes management with legislative, policy and fiscal responsibilities.

**Mission Alignment**

Administrative Services supports the agency's mission by providing overall guidance to ensure that the VDDHH's service areas function efficiently and in an environment focused on superior customer service and accountability.

**Products and Services**

**Description of Major Products and Services**

Advisory Board - VDDHH provides staff support to the gubernatorially appointed advisory board. Support includes research, training, policy guidance, logistics and administrative support.

Legislative Liaison - VDDHH provides legislative analysis and expert testimony on bills related to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The liaison provides timely updates on legislation affecting people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Regulatory Coordination - VDDHH maintains regulations for public participation, TAP and Interpreter Programs.

Interagency Collaboration - In order to ensure that programs and services of the Commonwealth address communications access issues and other concerns of people who are deaf or hard of hearing, VDDHH staff often serve on work groups, task forces, and planning groups with other state agencies, providing program and policy guidance.

Administrative Support - Administrative Services provides general guidance, provide administrative and office support to all of VDDHH programs. This include but not limited to office procedures, publications, facility and state car, vendor registration, and website coordination.

**Anticipated Changes**

Agency regulations need to be updated to reflect changes in program administration and technology. None of the proposed changes are expected to be controversial.

**Factors Impacting**

VDDHH operates with limited staff, each of whom has multiple responsibilities. This reality significantly impacts our ability to effectively respond to emerging issues while maintaining a high level of customer service satisfaction.

With several staff members at or beyond eligibility for full retirement and few opportunities for meaningful succession planning, the agency has concerns about meeting demands for service in the future.

**Financial Overview**

Of the annual General Fund Appropriation, \$38,798 is paid to the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services for the provision of administrative and back-office functions as outlined in our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU includes human resources, information technology, fiscal, facility, state vehicle, and procurement support. An additional \$53,206 is budgeted for direct payment for VITA services. The remaining appropriation is for the oversight, guidance and operational support to all programs.

Biennial Budget

	2019 General Fund	2019 Nongeneral Fund	2020 General Fund	2020 Nongeneral Fund
Initial Appropriation for the Biennium	393,619	0	393,619	0
Changes to Initial Appropriation	0	0	0	0

**Supporting Documents**

Title	File Type
Disability Services Agencies Memorandum Of Understandingyyyy	Adobe PDF
Disability Services Agencies MOU 2017 Updateyyyyy	Adobe PDF