Report on The Response of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to the Impact of the Aging of Virginia’s Population

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FROM: Ronald L. Lanier, Director

RE: REPORT ON ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF THE AGING OF THE POPULATION

Pursuant to legislation enacted by the Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) submits this report of its progress for addressing the impact of the aging of the population.
Executive Summary

This document comprises the report of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) in response to Virginia Code Requirements and guidance from the Virginia Department for the Aging. The report finds that all of the programs and services of VDDHH are uniformly available to Virginia residents over age 65 and that more than 50% of the recipients in one program, the Technology Assistance Program (TAP), are age 65 or older.
Agency Description

Mission Statement
The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) works to reduce the communication barriers between persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who are hearing, including family members, service providers, and the general public.

Programs

VDDHH Programs include Technology Assistance, Virginia Relay Oversight, Interpreter Services, Virginia Quality Assurance Screening, Outreach Services, and Library Services, which are designed to ensure widespread communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The foundation of all programs at VDDHH is communication - both as a service (through interpreters, technology and other modes) and as a means of sharing information for public awareness (through training and education).

- Technology Assistance Program – The Technology Assistance Program (TAP) provides assistive devices, primarily for telecommunications purposes, to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired free or at a reduced cost. In an effort to identify the most appropriate device for an individual’s communication needs, during Fiscal Year 2008, new procedures in the TAP program will enable applicants to try out assistive devices for a 30-day period prior to assignment. TAP also makes similar devices, as well as assistive listening systems, available for loan to state agencies, and businesses for short-term use.

- Virginia Relay Oversight – Virginia Relay is the Commonwealth’s federally-mandated telecommunications relay service which allows consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, deafblind, or speech disabled to communicate by TTY (text telephone) or another assistive telephone device with anyone who uses a standard phone. VDDHH provides all contract oversight and public awareness activities related to Virginia Relay and administers the state’s $14,000,000 telecommunications relay service fund. VDDHH also provides technical assistance to consumers for the use of internet-based relay services, including federally-supported Video Relay Services.

- Interpreter Services Coordination – VDDHH coordinates requests for interpreter services and Computer Assisted Real Time Captioning (CART) from state agencies and courts. The agency has established a contract for interpreter services, which other state agencies may join. The agency also coordinates interpreters for 12-step programs and other activities (such as funerals) on a very limited basis. The agency publishes (hard copy and electronic) 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 private entities in locating qualified interpreters for events involving consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- **Virginia Quality Assurance Screening** – VDDHH provides a program of 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.

- **Outreach Services** – Through Contractors, VDDHH Outreach provides information, service referrals, education, and advocacy for deaf and hard of hearing consumers. Outreach specialists work closely with the TAP program to demonstrate, help consumers to apply for, and set up and train on TAP devices. Also, sensitivity and awareness training can be conducted for schools and businesses. Workshops relating to hearing loss are also provided. Currently, VDDHH Outreach Services include a focus on emergency preparedness and response.

- **Library Services** – VDDHH maintains a library of books, videotapes, and DVD’s available for loan to residents of the Commonwealth. Materials to assist interpreters increase their skills are available for loan. The collection also includes a range of periodicals and brochures / informational materials specifically designed to educate consumers on a variety of topics related to hearing loss.
Data Requested

This report responds to guidance from the Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA)

1. To the extent such data is available, the number of persons who received services from the agency in the past fiscal year who fell into each of the following age ranges: 65-74; 75-84; and 85 and older. If the agency can provide data that compares such numbers to numbers of senior citizens served in the past, please do so. If the agency lacks specific information about the numbers of senior citizens it serves, but has other evidence indicating that it is serving more or fewer senior citizens than it has in the past, please describe the basis for that estimation.

Of the programs and services offered by VDDHH, only the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) collects data on the age of program participants. This program provides assistive devices, primarily for telecommunications purposes, to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired either free or at contract cost. Eligibility is based on verification of disability, income, and residency. There are no age restrictions. Devices available include text telephones (TTYs), large print TTYs, telephone amplifiers, Voice Carry Over Phones, Hearing Carry Over phones, Captioned Telephones, and visual, tactile, and audible signalers. Additional equipment may be available on a case-by-case basis. In Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07), program data show the following breakdown of services:

- Ages 65-74: 113 consumers served
- Ages 75-84: 214 consumers served
- Ages 85+: 155 consumers served.

The total number of individuals receiving equipment from the program in FY06 was 902, which means that 53% percent of the individuals served were over age 65. This represents a 3% increase in the number of consumers over age 65 served in the program as compared with Fiscal Year 2006.

2. Identify the agency services that are utilized by senior citizens 65 and older in significant numbers. Indicate whether the agency has the capacity at present to serve all interested seniors or whether the demand for certain services exceeds the agency’s capacity. If so, does the agency maintain waiting lists for services?

VDDHH offers the following programs and services which are likely utilized by senior citizens 65 and older, although specific data on such utilization is not available:

- Interpreter Services: VDDHH coordinates sign language interpreter services and Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART – real-time captioning) for state agencies and Virginia Courts. It may be assumed that some percentage of the
consumers who use interpreter and CART services coordinated by VDDHH are over the age of 65 but no specific data is available. The agency is able to fill more than 97% of all interpreter and CART requests and there is not waiting list for services.

- **Outreach Services:** Through contracts with service providers across the state, VDDHH provides Outreach Services, including training, technical assistance, and information and referral. Many of these services are targeted to senior citizens although no specific data is available. The contractors have not reported any problems in meeting the demand for services from persons over age 65.
- **Virginia Relay:** VDDHH has oversight for the state’s federally-mandated telecommunications relay service, Virginia Relay. A variety of different types of relay services are available in the Commonwealth, handling more than 1.5 million calls each year. Certainly, senior citizens are a significant percentage of Relay users, either as hearing callers receiving calls from individuals who are deaf, or deaf/late-deafened callers receiving calls from hearing individuals. The demand for services in no way exceeds capacity for this service.
- **Library Services:** VDDHH has a library of specialized materials available for loan to citizens of the Commonwealth. Among the items in our collection are a number of books and videos related to acquired hearing loss, hearing aids and lipreading. These items are frequently used by older Virginians although no specific age-related data is available. The library is currently able to meet the demand although, occasionally, there may be a short wait for an item which is already on loan.

3. **Identify current agency programs, specifically designed to serve seniors 65 and older, that fall into any of the following six categories: Health Care/Wellness; Education; Public Safety; Recreation; Financial Security (including Housing); and Transportation.**

**Health Care/Wellness:** Outreach Services continue to include targeted activities for seniors in adult communities and nursing homes. Specific attention is given to emergency preparedness and assistive technology.

Also, the agency has recently added devices to the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) which specifically benefit seniors with hearing loss.

All other agency programs are designed to serve citizens of all ages.

4. **Identify the extent to which your agency provides “consumer-oriented” publications and websites online that are designed to be “senior-friendly.” If the information you currently provide is not readily accessible to seniors, identify any steps your agency is taking to improve accessibility.**

The VDDHH website and informational brochures are currently undergoing revisions which will improve the “senior-friendliness” of both. We expect these to launch late in FY08. The agency continues maintain program information on the Senior Navigator site, although, in
preparing this report, we did identify that the information there needs to be updated. This will be done before January 1, 2008.

5. **Describe the effect that the aging of the agency’s own workforce will have on its ability to deliver services.** Consider the number of retirements expected in the next two years, the effect these retirements might have (e.g., loss of leadership or institutional knowledge in certain programs), how losses might be replaced (e.g., promotions or transfers, recruitment, use of wage staff, including retirees, re-engineering, outsourcing), and the costs or savings from the replacements (e.g., staff development cost, salary savings). This item might be addressed by summarizing relevant portions of the agency’s workforce plan.

It is important to note that, with only eleven current FTEs (and two vacancies), VDDHH has one of the smaller and more specialized state agency workforces in the Commonwealth. In the next two years, VDDHH faces the possible retirement of the current Director and the VDDHH Business Manager. A third position, the Relay and Technology Program Manager, will also be eligible for retirement in less than 3 years. In addition, the overall workforce at VDDHH is skewed toward an older demographic. Any savings from retirements will be minimal. The agency has considered many issues when preparing to address the potential “aging-out” of our workforce in the next few years, as noted in our Workforce Development report:

*From a succession planning perspective, the agency’s management positions are considered “key positions.”* Three of the current management team positions are Program Administration Manager II positions. Each has responsibility for management of more than one agency program and key features of the positions include contract development and management. The third member of the management team is a Policy and Planning Specialist II with responsibility for legislative, regulatory, policy and planning activities for all of the agency’s programs. Succession planning for these key positions should include:

- Cross-training for managers
- Outlining opportunities for current staff to consider for future advancement, providing information on competencies required, development needed, and opportunities for development.
- Offering opportunities for professionals in the field to develop meaningful program knowledge and experience through task force and work group participation
- Involving staff at all levels in problem resolution and strategic planning activities to ensure “big picture” thinking
- Developing internship opportunities with targeted universities (e.g. Gallaudet) and with appropriate professional and advocacy organizations (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Virginia Association of the Deaf, etc.)
- Consideration of alternatives to full time employment as incentives to maintain access to “institutional knowledge.”
6. Describe any other services or programs that the agency has implemented or plans to implement in the future to address the impact of the aging of Virginia’s population.

VDDHH recognizes that, as the over-65 population grows, so will the number of these individuals who may seek services from this agency. We continue to seek ways through all of our programs to better serve Virginia’s senior citizens.