

Daniel A. Micari, Commissioner, Chairperson
Barbara Bajurny, Commissioner
Andrew Collins, Commissioner, Secretary
Gloria Ewings, Commissioner
Ruth Ann Graime, Commissioner
Joseph Krolikowski, Commissioner
Jacqueline Olsen, City Council Liaison
Diane Salmoiraghi, Commissioner



**Commission for Persons with Disabilities
Bristol, CT 06010**

**Meeting Minutes
April 10, 2024**

7:00 PM – City Hall, Council Chamber

Our Mission

To promote inclusion and improve the quality of life for people in Bristol with a disability, by providing a network of partnerships with local resources that foster self-sufficiency, dignity, and respect.

Reasonable Accommodation Statement

The Bristol Commission for Persons with Disabilities is committed to equal access to, and participation in, all meetings and Commission-sponsored programs and events. Individuals who require an accommodation in order to fully participate, including physical access, communication assistance, or other special need, should contact Daniel A. Micari at damicari@yahoo.com, at least seven business days prior to the scheduled meeting, program, or event.

Present: Micari, Bajurny, Collins, Ewings, Graime, Krolikowski, Olsen, Salmoiraghi

Absent: None

Call to order: 7:05 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of Minutes: March 13, 2024 (Krolikowski/Ewings, passed)

Chairman Micari led the Commission in a moment of silence for Albert E. “Al” Sonier who passed away on March 16, 2024. Mr. Sonier was known for his advocacy on behalf of those with disabilities, involvement with the Commission, and a love of Bristol Blues baseball.

Presentation: Christina Benvenuto and Nancy Plasczynski, Bristol Hospital
Leslie Warren, CoSignCt
Topic: Awareness of and Accommodations for Patients Who are Deaf, Blind or with Low Vision

Commissioner Bajurny began the presentation by introducing the speakers.

Ms. Warren introduced herself as the CEO of CoSignCT, a company that provides sign language services. She gave an overview of the history of deaf services in Connecticut noting that a rubella outbreak in the 1960s led to an increase in deaf children being born. In 1974, the state set up a commission to coordinate deaf services. By the 1990s, shortages of interpreters began to be a problem, especially with finding younger people to fill such roles. This is a problem that continues to today including instances of hospitals facing lawsuits due to a lack of deaf interpretation services.

Ms. Warren offered additional information regarding deaf interpretation. She stated that, in a medical environment, family members should not be interpreters due to a conflict of interest. She also stated that some doctors need to better understand the need for interpreters and not rely on lip reading. She stated that written communication is only okay, but that some members of the deaf community may have difficulty with it. In short, deaf interpreters, who are certified and adhere to a strict code of ethics, are the best option for hospitals.

Ms. Warren turned over the presentation to Luisa Gasco-Soboleski, President of the Connecticut Association of the Deaf. As a member of the deaf community, Ms. Gasco-Soboleski provided information based on first-hand experience and involvement within the community. She previously taught at the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford. As a former teacher, she stated how important it is to provide good services to deaf children, of whom only 10% are born to deaf parents. The first five years of a child's life are critical to language acquisition.

Ms. Gasco-Soboleski stated that prior to 2016, Connecticut had good deaf services before the state agency responsible for such services was disestablished due to financial constraints. She has been advocating with members of the General Assembly to reestablish this agency which, as of the meeting, was likely to be enacted this year. She stated that involvement with this legislation by the deaf community created a stronger law as previous laws lacked such representation.

Ms. Gasco-Soboleski also criticized the use of video remote interpreting (VRI) use in hospitals and doctor's offices as a substitute for an in-person interpreter. She noted many shortcomings of the technology including impossibility of use by deafblind patients, regional differences in sign language, and problems with the technology itself. She provided real-life examples of the problems with this technology.

Christina Benvenuto presented on behalf of Bristol Health. She stated that the hospital has learned how to best work with deaf patients through experience.

This included having multiple vendors for services. She also stated that they understand that VRI technology does not work well.

Ms. Benvenuto echoed what previous speakers stated in that there needs to be more resources and interpreters available for patients who need them. She stated that patients can request a preferred interpreter that is known to the patient or can demand either a male or female interpreter.

Throughout the presentations, the speakers fielded and answered questions from commissioners and members of the audience with a focus on additional concerns related to the experience of patients, including deaf and blind patients.

New/Current Business

*Chairman Micari confirmed that the May 8 meeting will feature a presentation by Scott Heth, Executive Director of the Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut.

*Regarding the installation of the smoke/CO detectors for deaf residents, Chairman Micari stated that from his most recent conversations with Chief Hart that an electrician has been identified who will perform the work.

Old Business

*Chairman Bajurny led the Commission in demonstrating various ASL signs related to weather.

Correspondence

*Chairman Micari stated that he sent a message to Raymond Rogozinski, Director of Public Works, regarding posting City Hall offices on the elevator.

*Chairman Micari stated that he sent thank you messages to Marco Palmeri and Dr. Christon Grant for their presentations at the March 13, 2024, meeting.

Public Participation

None

Motion to adjourn: Krolikowski/Ewings, passed **Meeting adjourned:** 8:25 PM

Next meeting: May 8, 2024, at 7:00 PM
City Hall, 3rd floor meeting room 3-1

Presenter: Scott Heth, Executive Director of the Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut

Topic: Harry C. Barnes Memorial Nature Center - Programs,
Updates and Nature Trail News

Submitted by,
Andrew Collins, Secretary