



State of Louisiana
Louisiana Department of Health
Office of Public Health

**ADVISORY COUNCIL
FOR THE EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INFANTS**

**Friday, April 24, 2026
12:00-2:30 p.m.**

Location

Benson Tower, Suite 2024
1450 Poydras Street
New Orleans, LA 70112

Meeting Minutes

- I. Call to Order at 12:12 p.m. – Ashley Argrave-Smith, Chair
 - a. Reviewed meeting and communication standards
- II. Roll Call – Susannah Boudreaux, Secretary
 - a. Council members present: Ashley Argrave-Smith, Paul Remedios, Deborah Cowan, Kristen Williams, Caitlyn Robinson, Susannah Boudreaux, Marissa Ramos, Jill Hudson
 - b. Council members absent: Jana Broussard (Vanessa Magnon), John Carter, Cynthia Voelker, Natalie Delgado (Jay Isch), Lauren Jones, Shannon Thibodeaux
-Quorum met
 - c. Council member vacancies: an otolaryngologist/otologist (applicant Adam Master), a neonatologist (applicant Danielle Thompson), a parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing utilizing total communication (applicant Melissa Dillmore), a representative from the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf (applicant Vanessa Magnon)
 - d. Bureau of Family Health: Dana Hubbard, Terri Ibieta, Amanda Burkhardt, Thomas Hess
 - e. Public: Melissa Dillmore, parent, Nicole Deleon, Louisiana Hands and Voices, Adam Masters, Ochsner
 - f. Interpreters: Sylvie Sullivan, Annette Pourciau
- III. Council Membership – Susannah Boudreaux, Advisory Council Secretary, reviewed the newly appointed or re-appointed to the council, as well as those with outstanding applicants not yet appointed. Council member seats awaiting appointment include: an otolaryngologist/otologist (applicant Adam Master), a neonatologist (applicant Danielle Thompson), a parent of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing utilizing total communication (applicant Melissa Dillmore), a representative from the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf (applicant Vanessa Magnon).
- IV. Mandate review – Dana Hubbard, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program Manager
 - a. Dana Hubbard reviewed the statutory duties of the Advisory Council, including consultation with the EHDI Program regarding data collection, coordination of audiological and educational services, quality assurance, and materials distributed related to infants who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing.
- V. Public Comment
 - a. No public comments submitted prior to the meeting.
 - b. No public comments made at this time.
- VI. Approval of Agenda and Minutes – Ashley Argrave-Smith, Chair

- a. Motion made by Marissa Ramos to add discussion regarding resources from the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf, Inc. (CEASD) under New Business. Motion seconded by Paul Remedios. Motion passed by vote unanimously.
- b. April 2026 Agenda approved. Motions to accept: 1st Paul Remedios, 2nd Deborah Cowan.
- c. January 2026 Agenda approved. Motions to accept: 1st Deborah Cowan, 2nd Paul Remedios.
- d. January 2026 Minutes approved. Motions to accept: 1st Deborah Cowan, 2nd Paul Remedios.
- e. October 2025 Minutes approved. Motions to accept: 1st Deborah Cowan, 2nd Susannah Boudreaux.

VII. Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program Updates – EHDI Program Staff

- a. Medicaid Billing for Audiological Services – Amanda Burkhardt, EHDI System Development Specialist, provided an overview of current Medicaid reimbursement limitations impacting pediatric audiology services in Louisiana. Current Medicaid policy limits reimbursement for several audiological procedure codes to once every 180 days, creating barriers for children requiring more frequent diagnostic monitoring. Dr. Burkhardt reviewed commonly impacted CPT codes, including auditory brainstem response (ABR) testing, tympanometry, air conduction audiometry, bone conduction audiometry, and comprehensive audiological evaluations. She explained that many pediatric hearing conditions require follow-up testing well before six months due to fluctuating hearing loss, middle ear conditions, or post-treatment monitoring needs. The Council discussed the financial and access-to-care implications of unreimbursed services, particularly for providers in smaller or rural geographic areas. Marissa Ramos shared clinical examples illustrating how hearing status may fluctuate significantly within a short period of time and emphasized the impact on speech and language development. Dana Hubbard shared that the EHDI program has been collaborating with the newborn screening workgroup to discuss issues related to newborn screening processes, including reimbursement for services. The workgroup includes Medicaid and Office of Public Health revenue representation. Dr. Burkhardt gathered supporting documentation and redacted statewide billing samples from providers to illustrate the issue. Findings will be shared with the workgroup to support exploration of potential policy changes. Additionally, council members discussed the possibility of lending support to emphasize the positive impact of timely testing and follow-up on children's development, if needed.
- b. Family Support – Dana Hubbard, EHDI Program Manager provided an update regarding Louisiana Hands & Voices and Guide By Your Side family support services. The approval process timeline for contracts is nine months. The contract began development in July 2025. The vendor was advised in July that a System for Award Management (SAM) identification number was necessary. At that time the vendor completed the necessary steps to establish the SAM number. Due to the government shut down, the vendor did not receive their SAM number until December 2, 2025. The contract is moving through the approval process with the Office of Public Health, and is at Step 9 since January 16, 2026. Nicole DeLeon, Guide By Your Side Coordinator, shared that Hands & Voices has continued providing limited support using organizational funds, but expressed concern regarding sustainability of services without contract funding. Ashley Argrave-Smith facilitated discussion regarding possible ways the Advisory Council could support the continuation of these services, including developing letters of support and collaboration with Hands & Voices representatives. Melissa Dilmore shared personal testimony regarding the benefit of Louisiana Hands & Voices services for her family and expressed willingness to provide a parent support letter, if helpful.

- Break 12:47-12:52

- c. Data Dissemination – Dana Hubbard, EHDI Program Manager shared an update on the development of Louisiana EHDI Program data materials. The six-page informational document includes updated 2024 data submitted to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding screening, diagnosis, follow-up, referral, and early intervention outcomes. Program improvements highlighted the reductions in declined early intervention referrals from 24% in 2022 to 9% in 2024. The materials, once approved, will be shared during regional collaborative meetings, conferences, and community outreach activities.

d. Strategic Planning – Dana Hubbard, EHDI Program Manager reviewed the EHDI Integrated Strategic Plan for 2024–2029. The strategic plan integrates federal and state requirements, Joint Committee on Infant Hearing recommendations, infrastructure assessments, logic models, and grant work plans. The plan includes six primary infrastructure focus areas: governance and leadership, data, clinical systems, family support, workforce training, and community engagement.

Priority areas reviewed included:

- Strengthening constituent engagement and partnerships
- Enhancing data systems and analytic capacity
- Improving 1-3-6 outcomes
- Expanding screening capacity for children up to age three
- Family engagement and support
- Workforce education and learning collaboratives

Discussion pertaining to the strategic plan included the transition to the HiTrack Data Management System and ongoing efforts to improve statewide electronic data integration. Dana Hubbard also tied the goals of the strategic plan to the deliverables for the following federal grants: Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. Ashley Argrave-Smith and Terri Ibieta discussed current collaboration with school systems and audiologists related to accessing newborn hearing screening information and how to report children newly diagnosed with a hearing loss through age five.

VIII. Old Business

a. EHDI Law – Ashley Argrave-Smith, Chair provided an update on Senate Bill 451 (SB451), which proposes several revisions to the current LA EHDI law. With support from Senator Caleb Kleinpeter, the bill was presented before the Senate Health and Welfare committee and passed favorably.

Proposed revisions include:

- Alignment with national 1-3-6 standards
- Modernization of medical terminology
- Clarification of statutory language
- Expanded definitions related to language development and communication
- Increased representation of individuals with lived experience on the Advisory Council
- Expanded reporting requirements

Dana Hubbard reviewed the proposed expansion of Advisory Council membership to include representatives from Part C Early Intervention, additional parent representatives, a young adult who is d/Deaf or hard of hearing, a parent who is d/Deaf or hard of hearing with a d/Deaf or hard of hearing child, and a representative from the Governor’s Advisory Council for Disability Affairs. The bill is currently pending review in the House Health and Welfare Committee.

b. EHDI Infrastructure

i. Guidelines for Working with Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing – Caitlyn Robinson, Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), shared updates about the collaborative work with LA EHDI leadership to build capacity of LDOE administrators, principals, and educators working with children who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing. The collaboration focuses on the “Guidelines for Working with Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.” LDOE plans to incorporate components of these guidelines into an upcoming Community of Practice webinar and other professional development activities for educators serving young children with disabilities. Ashley Argrave-Smith and Dana Hubbard plan to participate as presenters during the September webinar in recognition of National Deaf Awareness Month. The guidelines will also be presented by Ashley Argrave, during the Louisiana Special Education Administrators (LASEA) Conference.

- ii. LEAD-K / Deaf Mentorship – a written update was submitted by Ivette Perez, Guidance, Outreach, and Language Development (GOLD) program director, and shared by Dana Hubbard. The Louisiana Special School District will reinstate the statewide Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) task force under the initiative, leadership of Superintendent Dr. Shirley Lewis. The task force will revisit prior recommendations from the 2019 report, including language milestones, assessment tools, and tracking systems. The update also emphasized the importance of strengthening collaboration between Guide By Your Side, Deaf Guides, and the GOLD Program to improve visibility and access to support from d/Deaf and hard of hearing adults and family support services. Members also discussed the importance of updating Louisiana's Guidelines for Working with Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and addressing copyright considerations associated with future revisions.

IX. New Business

- a. Marissa Ramos shared information regarding resources and presentations from the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), including discussion of the REAL Program (Regional Early Acquisition of Language Project), which supports multiple EHDI programs nationally with language data collection, interpretation, consultation, and reporting. Ms. Ramos shared that the REAL Program and the University of Colorado Boulder provide support to programs related to language assessment scoring, interpreting data, developing family-friendly reports, and comparing outcomes across programs and states.

Dana Hubbard shared that the Louisiana EHDI Program partnered with the University of Colorado Boulder for two years with supplemental funding from Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) to train providers, score assessments, generate individualized reports and complete comparative data analyses utilizing the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Developmental Inventories-III. . The purpose of conducting language assessments was to establish baseline data regarding language acquisition among the population of 0-three years olds who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing in Louisiana. The goal was to identify a method to sustain this collection. Discussion among council members focused on challenges with sustainability associated with contracts and funding timelines, as well as opportunities to continue language outcome assessments through collaboration with the GOLD Program, REAL Program, and other partners.

Additional discussion included possible integration of teachers of the deaf into the intake and evaluation processes in EarlySteps to support future language assessments and data collection efforts. Marissa Ramos made a motion to reopen the Language Outcomes Workgroup during the next quarter to discuss sustainability of language assessment activities, language data collection, and resources supporting language acquisition for children and families. The motion received a second by Deborah Cowan. Members also talked about broadening the purpose of the workgroup to allow for continued discussion of sustainability strategies and identifying language outcome priorities in the future. Motion passed unanimously. Individuals expressing interest in participating in the Language Outcomes Workgroup included Marissa Ramos and Jay Isch. Dana Hubbard shared that participation is not limited to Advisory Council members and may include teachers of the deaf, parents, and other constituents.

X. Partner Updates

- a. Jay Isch shared appreciation regarding the continued progress of initiatives related to language outcomes and acknowledged the ongoing work of the Council and EHDI partners.
- b. Dana Hubbard thanked the Advisory Council and legislative workgroup members for their efforts related to Senate Bill 451 and acknowledged testimony provided before the Senate Health and Welfare Committee by Ashley Argrave-Smith, Natalie Delgado, and Jay Isch in support of the legislation.

XI. Public Comment

- a. Marissa Ramos inquired about next steps for reactivating the Language Outcomes Workgroup and future participation opportunities. Dana Hubbard shared that the EHDI Program would

coordinate with the workgroup chair to schedule future meetings and communicate participation opportunities.

b. No additional public comments e made.

XII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Marissa Ramos. Motion seconded by Kristen Williams. Meeting adjourned at 2:11 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, July 24, 2026 from 12:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. and will be held at Benson Tower in New Orleans.

Presenters, members, and guests may submit requests for accessibility and accommodations prior to a scheduled meeting. Please submit a request to at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting with details of the required accommodations.