

Meeting the Needs of Nevada's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Population

Interim Committee on Seniors,
Veterans, and Adults with Special
Needs

June 13, 2016

Gary W. Olsen, Chair
and Deaf Advocate

Subcommittee on Communication Services for Persons who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and Persons with Speech Disabilities of the Nevada Commission on Services for Person with Disabilities (NRS 427A.750)

History

- SOCS (formerly CAC) was created by NV legislature to advise ODS (now ADSD) on issues related to services provided to DHH by ODS/ADSD. This started with telecommunications access (relay and equipment) in the '80's-'90's then interpreter oversight and Deaf centers were added later, 2003.
- ADSD and SOCS have successfully addressed issues related to relay and telecommunication equipment for years and look forward to continuing success with changing technology.

Progress

- Last session ADSD and SOCS made great gains in the administration of the interpreter registry, adding staff and upgrading the IT system. SOCS working group will continue to meet and looks forward to continued collaboration with ADSD on various changes.
- Last session SOCS made great gains with the administration of deaf centers, which were temporarily de-funded as a result of the inconsistency of budget approval between NV legislature and PUC, which the legislature solved last session.

Needs

Strategic Plan to address systems and individuals.

- **Systems access improvement** – An entity such as a Commission for recommending improvements to laws, rules, or agency practices to improve outcomes for Nevadans who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or with Speech Disabilities, and their families. This Commission is directly responsible for systemic advocacy. In this capacity, the Commission is responsible for conducting a comprehensive review and analysis of the state disability system, which informs the Strategic Plan. This work assists individuals with speech/hearing disabilities by addressing barriers at the local, state, or national level. The focus can be changing laws or changing written or unwritten policies. Activities supporting systemic advocacy include outreach, information gathering, training, barrier elimination, system design, system redesign, and informing policy makers.
- **Individual access assistance** – Community-based Centers that provides services that trains individuals to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. Self-advocacy means understanding one's strengths, needs, personal goals, legal rights, and legal responsibilities. It also means communicating these to others. Self-advocacy is speaking up for oneself.

CHALLENGES

- **SOCS is limited in scope of advisory-** Increasingly, the issues SOCS aims to address are beyond the authority of ADSD's programs for Relay, Equipment, Interpreter Registry and Deaf Centers. Over the years, there has been a shift in public comment at SOCS meetings from telecommunication access to access to other government services. While the Deaf Centers can provide access assistance to individuals on a case-by-case basis, there is some limitation to this approach.
- **Deaf Centers can't do it all-** We cannot saddle Deaf Centers with the responsibility of addressing all government systems access. Deaf Centers are community-based organizations with limited reach. Deaf Centers work at the individual level within the communities they serve, and report needs for systemic access improvement to the best of their abilities (to SOCS and/or ADSD.)

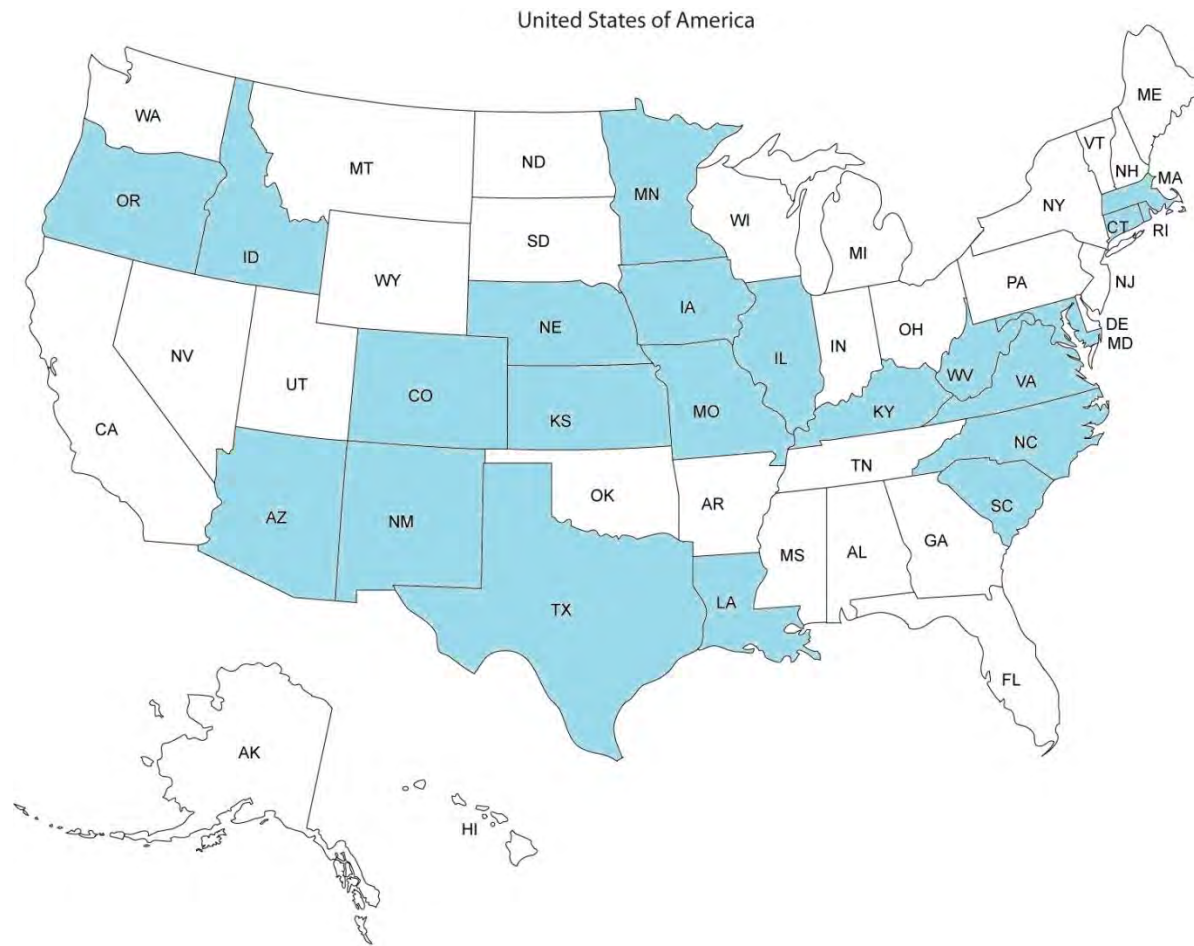
Funding

- The program is funded through the telecommunications surcharge fund. Money for this fund comes from a surcharge on all phone lines in the State of Nevada.

Solution

- Deaf Centers are half of the equation. If Deaf Centers shift their focus from individual to system access, individuals lose priority of service and systems don't change because Deaf Centers do not have any consistent mechanism for government improvement. Thus, we see a need for a governmental entity working toward these issues, a Commission for DHH Nevadans.
- Currently, in the US, approximately 25-30 other states have seen success using this model.* Each Commission is set up a little differently, but the overarching concepts are the same: Providing effective leadership, education, advocacy and programs to reduce barriers to the social, economic, educational, cultural and intellectual well-being of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals and their families, friends and colleagues.

Other State's with similar models



Advantages

- SOCS has existing framework for meetings, already knowledgeable about issues
 - Greater capacity for individual empowerment
 - Increased Transparency (how TDD surcharge is spent)**
 - Cohesive approach implementing strategic plan
 - Improved ability to join national conversations and provide Nevada perspective/opportunity to lead.

Accountability

Commission required to meet monthly and provide reports to both legislature and governor's office, responsible to direct staff in carrying out activities and monitor performance.

Commission to serve as a resource to all branches of Nevada Government regarding issues related to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nevadans and Nevadans with Speech Disabilities.