



September 1, 2024

The Honorable Jared Polis
Governor, State of Colorado

The Honorable Julie McCluskie
Speaker, Colorado House of Representatives

The Honorable Stephen Fenberg
President, Colorado Senate

Governor Jared Polis, Speaker McCluskie, and President Fenberg:

The Colorado Department of Human Services, in response to reporting requirements set forth in Section 26-21-106, C.R.S., respectfully submits the attached Colorado Commission for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind Report.

“(1)(e) Assessing the needs of deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind and reporting annually to the governor and the general assembly any recommendations for legislation or administrative changes that may facilitate or streamline the provision of general government services to deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind. Notwithstanding section 24-1-136 (11)(a)(I), on or before September 1 of each year, the commission must file the report required by this subsection (1)(e). In preparing the annual report and recommendations, the commission shall consider the following:

(I) Whether any existing statutory or administrative provisions impede the ability of the commission to act as a statewide coordinating agency advocating for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deafblind individuals in Colorado;

(II) Any methods, programs, or policies that may improve communication accessibility and quality of existing services, promote or deliver necessary new services, and assist state agencies in the delivery of services to deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind;

(III) Any methods, programs, or policies that may make providing access to government services more efficient; and

(IV) Any methods, programs, or policies that may improve implementation of state policies affecting deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind and their relationship with the general public, industry, health care, and educational institutions.”

If you have any questions, please contact Angelica Granados, CDHS’ Legislative Analyst, at 303-877-0562.

Sincerely,

Christina Beisel

Christina Beisel
Deputy Executive Director, Financial Services



Colorado Commission for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Annual Legislative Report - September 1, 2024

This report is provided on behalf of the Colorado Commission for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind (CCDHHDB) per Section 26-21-106(1)(e), C.R.S., which requires CCDHHDB to “Assess the needs of deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind and report annually to the Governor and the General Assembly any recommendations for legislation or administrative changes that may facilitate or streamline the provision of general government services to deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind.”

Although there are many issues and priorities in our deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind (DHHDB) communities, CCDHHDB is cognizant of emerging trends and needs where specific policy recommendations can be provided for legislation or administrative changes. CCDHHDB consulted on several inquiries where DHHDB children were in the foster care system with limited communication access; DHHDB parents engaged with child welfare services and experienced barriers; and community members approached CCDHHDB expressing concern about the shrinking number of culturally and linguistically accessible foster families for DHHDB children. These issues are not limited to Colorado, as the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) had formed a task force to explore system issues related to DHHDB children and foster care. The task force's goal was to write a model bill for states to review and potentially adopt, and that work is still in progress. However, they have developed a position statement.

In FY 2022-23, CCDHHDB contracted with a deaf Colorado community member who was also a foster parent and member of the NAD task force to perform a needs assessment of DHHDB children in Colorado's foster care system. The objective was to present the results to the legislature in CCDHHDB's annual report. The work was completed in FY 2023-24.

The assessment aimed to identify existing system resources, strengths, and areas needing improvement regarding child welfare agencies' readiness to provide accessible and inclusive services to DHHDB individuals. A survey focusing on equity, communication access, and professional qualifications was developed in collaboration with the Division of Child Welfare (DCW) and disseminated to Colorado's 64 counties and two Indigenous child welfare agencies. Fifty-seven child welfare agencies, or 86% of Colorado's welfare system, participated in the needs assessment.

The needs assessment report provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities concerning resources and services for DHHDB individuals within child welfare agencies. The report's recommendations can potentially improve the inclusivity, accessibility, and overall quality of services provided to DHHDB children, parents, and caregivers involved in the child welfare system.

The needs statement revealed significant gaps in equity, communication access, and professional qualifications within child welfare agencies. It identified gaps in terms of a lack of comprehensive policies and effective coordination of communication access services to serve DHHDB children and their families better. In many cases, child welfare or foster care professionals who are trained in cultural and linguistic competencies to support DHHDB children and their families were not available. If unaddressed, disparities of services for and language deprivation among DHHDB children will continue.

For example, while 25 out of 57 child welfare agencies (44%) reported having a language accessibility policy or procedure, only two agencies (3%) said they had policies addressing communication access services for DHHDB individuals. Disparities were noted in providing communication access services within child welfare services (e.g., legal proceedings, visits with caseworkers, therapeutic visitation with the child, behavioral health services, etc.). The report identified the following as barriers that contribute to these disparities:

- Limited resources for rural communities.
- Lack of uniform, DHHDB-specific training and resources.
- Absence of DHHDB-specific guidelines.
- Financial barriers in getting culturally affirmative providers and communication access service providers (sign language interpreters or real-time captioners).

Since the survey distribution and report completion, there has been passage of child welfare legislation, including HB21-1110, HB24-1017, and HB24-008, which may or may not address some of the concerns identified in the needs assessment. Therefore, it is determined that CCDHHDB and DCW will work together to review the needs assessment against existing and new system practices to identify and prioritize actionable items. Historical information will be shared with the Child Welfare Policy submittal committee members to identify the next steps as a collaborative effort to improve services at the state and county levels.