

West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

NEWSLETTER

“Advocacy is empathy, compassion, and community at work.” - Janna Cachola



Letter from the WVCDHH Executive Director

Erik Essington, Ph.D.

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Deaf Awareness Day 2025

Deaf Awareness Day 2025 is a time to celebrate Deaf culture, recognize the contributions of the Deaf community, and promote inclusivity and accessibility. This event raises awareness about the history, language, and challenges faced by Deaf and hard of hearing individuals while fostering greater understanding and support.

What is Deaf Awareness Day?

Deaf Awareness Day is an annual event dedicated to increasing awareness of the Deaf community, their rich culture, and their communication needs. It is an opportunity to highlight the rights of Deaf individuals in West Virginia and to encourage meaningful engagement between the Deaf and hearing communities.

History of the Event

Deaf Awareness Day evolved from Deaf Awareness Week, which was established to dispel misconceptions about the Deaf community and promote equal opportunities. This event serves as a powerful reminder of the need for communication accessibility and full inclusion in all aspects of society.

When is Deaf Awareness Day?

Deaf Awareness Day will take place on **March 19, 2025, at the West Virginia State Capitol**. The day will feature educational and outreach activities led by Deaf organizations, community groups, and advocates. Senator Darren Thorne will present a Certificate of Recognition, while Delegate David Cannon will sponsor the House Citation for the day. Deaf students from the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (WVSDDB) and Kanawha County, under the direction of Meegan Wolfe, along with students from other counties, will perform at the House of Delegates.

How to Get Involved

- ✓ **Learn Sign Language** – Take an ASL class or promote ASL education in your community.
- ✓ **Attend Events** – Join workshops, seminars, and cultural activities celebrating Deaf achievements.
- ✓ **Support Deaf Businesses & Artists** – Purchase from Deaf-owned businesses and support Deaf performers.
- ✓ **Educate Others** – Share information about Deaf awareness in schools, workplaces, and social media.
- ✓ **Advocate for Accessibility** – Encourage captioning, ASL interpretation, and inclusive spaces in public venues and online.

**Join us in celebrating Deaf Awareness Day 2025
and help create a more inclusive and accessible West Virginia!**



Introduction

Hometown: Gilbert, West Virginia

Current Residence: Sumerco, WV

Spouse/Partner: Donald Gillispie

Children: Noah Gillispie

Hobbies: Traveling

Board member representation role/title: Audiologist



Community Spotlight



Nancy Gillispie

Au.D., CCC-A, F.A.A.A.

Professional Hearing Solutions, LLC

Academic, and/or Professional Background

After completing my undergraduate degree at Marshall University, I attended West Virginia University to complete my Master's Degree in Audiology. While beginning my career in private practice in January 2003, I completed my Doctoral degree in Audiology at the Pennsylvania School of Audiology, which is now Salus University. Before starting my own practice in 2009, I also gained professional experience within a medical practice. Since the opening of my practice, I have had the pleasure of expanding my focus to include newborn hearing testing and educational services.

What motivated you to become involved with the WVCDHH, and how have your experiences on the board impacted your views on advocacy for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community?

I always wanted to support the people of our beautiful state. I sincerely love my profession. With the opportunity to become part of WVCDHH, I can share this passion with more people. I have had the wonderful experience of seeing first-hand some of the limited resources available to our communities such as access to qualified interpreters. Through our meetings and social gatherings, the board continues to perpetuate my desire to advocate for our communities. However, I am open to suggestions for my participation and energy going forward to help in any manner.

What do you think are the biggest challenges currently facing the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community in West Virginia, and how can community members, organizations, and policymakers work together to address these issues?

The biggest challenge for the DHH community is the lack of access to QUALIFIED interpreters. The gravity of the situation is often addressed by those who do not have experience with interpreters. The initiation of the concept must come cohesively from colleges/universities, mentors, all organizations, and policymakers. Thereafter, unwavering accountability must then be held firmly from all sides.

What initiatives or projects are you most proud of contributing to during your time on the board or in your professional capacity, and how have they made a difference for individuals in West Virginia's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community?

I am currently very motivated to assist our board in creating a hearing aid loaner program for those who do not have access to various amplification devices. This venture is currently in the initial phase of gathering information and creating relationships with various professionals and groups. I am so excited to see the outcomes of our efforts.

How do you see the role of WVCDHH evolving in the future, and what goals or changes would you like to see implemented to further support Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals across the state?

The future of the WVCDHH has unlimited opportunities for growth. Our access to new information via the internet, various members, and potential new relationships with other entities create potential unique avenues. I hope that we are daring enough to engage in the excitement of growth to meet our full potential. It's time to think outside the box. To be very specific, I would like to reach out (maybe only social media) to those of the community and ask about exciting events or projects they would like to bring to our state. We do not have to re-create the wheel. Just gain some excitement among our crowd to start moving!

Do you have a favorite inspirational quote you would like to share?

"Let all that you do be done in love." 1 Corinthians 16:14





Deaf-Owned

Treat Yourself to Pure Joy
WarnersBakery.com



**Warner's Bakery
Owner, Hilary Hanna**

After graduating from the Rochester Institute of Technology, Hilary Hanna embarked on her professional journey with an architecture firm in Erie, Pennsylvania. For over eight years, she thrived in the world of design and creativity. However, an unexpected layoff led her to a crossroads—one that would ignite a newfound passion for baking.

In 2019, Hilary joined Warner's Bakery, a beloved institution founded in 1949 by Ellsworth Warner. Known for its iconic smiley cookie and commitment to high-quality, fresh-baked treats, the bakery quickly became more than just a workplace—it became home. Under the mentorship of Kathy Licht, who had owned the bakery since 2011, Hilary learned the intricacies of the baking business and discovered where she truly belonged.

When Kathy announced her retirement in April 2024, Hilary took a bold step forward and became the proud owner of Warner's Bakery.

Now, with enthusiasm and dedication, she looks ahead to the future—ready to embrace new challenges, nurture her family, and continue serving the community with the delicious creations that have made Warner's Bakery a cherished local tradition. The journey has been incredible, and Hilary is excited for what's to come—building on the bakery's legacy while sharing her passion for baking with future generations.



Warner's Bakery
115 North Franklin St.
Titusville, PA 16354
[\(814\) 827-2330](tel:8148272330)

Mon - Thu: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Fri: 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Sat: 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Sun: Closed

**Warner's Bakery -Seasonal
Tionesta Market Village**
300 Elm Street
Tionesta, PA 16353

Mon - Thu: Closed
Fri: 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Sat: 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Sun: Closed
(Reopening in Spring)



Scan the QR code to visit the Warner's Bakery website



Parent To Parent

Carrie and Emily Bignall Our Journey with Hearing Loss



What was your first reaction when you learned your child was Deaf or hard of hearing (DHH), and how did you find support in those early days?

I was very surprised to learn our daughter was hard of hearing. She was diagnosed in the summer after 2nd grade. Having passed her newborn and Kindergarten hearing screening tests, we never imagined she would experience hearing loss. Being summer (and no school) we found a lot of support - and curiosity - from our immediate family and our church family. Emily designed the colors of her hearing aids/molds and everyone commended her for how beautiful they were.

What challenges did you face when navigating your child's diagnosis, and how did you overcome them?

Emily struggled with sensory and texture stimulation as a toddler and young child. The "feeling" of having ear molds in her ears was very hard for her. Prior to her hearing loss, she was always sensitive to loud noises. They were jarring and scary for her. Once her hearing aids allowed her to fully hear again, she had to adjust to how "loud" everything was again.

What advice would you give to parents who have recently learned their child is DHH?

It's ok to react however you react; there is no right or wrong way. Allow yourself and your child to express the feelings you are going through. Seek out support and don't be afraid to ask questions of other kids, parents, health care providers, etc.

What programs or services have had the greatest impact on your child's development and education?

Emily was already a student at Shoals Elementary, the designated school for DHH students pre-K to 5th grade in Kanawha County. She was right where she needed to be when her hearing loss occurred! In 3rd grade, Emily became part of the DHH community at Shoals Elementary. She was able to be around other kids who were DHH with hearing aids and cochlear implants. As she began to make friends in this community, I wanted to learn sign language and more about Deaf culture. I'm now 2 1/2 years into learning ASL. While I started this part of my education out of a desire to communicate with her Deaf friends and their parents, I've since realized how important this skill can be. I will be able to help communicate in an emergency and hopefully, encourage DHH people in my community by showing my willingness to include them.

How did you go about finding resources like speech therapy, ASL classes, or assistive technology?

We were so fortunate that Emily's speech was already fully developed before she experienced hearing loss. In fact, her speech is so completely unaffected that often people don't realize the significance of her hearing loss. I saw an ad on Facebook for a private teacher, out of California, that gives ASL lessons on Zoom. I take her class once a week. I also have attended an online ASL 1 course through WVCDHH. I'm looking forward to the offering of ASL 2! I found various WV groups on Facebook and try to follow along as much as I can. My daughter has attended an ASL camp for a week during the summer.

What role has access to sign language interpreters or Deaf mentors played in your child's education?

I love that Emily knows basic sign language and can communicate with those in the community. She will likely never become fluent in the language, but I am proud of her for what she has retained even after not being around sign language interpreters anymore.

What has your experience been working with your child's school and IEP team? Any tips for parents on advocating for their child's needs?

While at Shoals, I was pleasantly surprised at how amazing they were. They made everything so easy. As I've connected online with parents from other states, I've been shocked to realize that not all schools provide the same resources as Shoals. In fact, some schools do not fully support the inclusion of the Deaf community in the classroom.

After elementary school, our family decided not to continue with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) program offered by our school district. Since Emily has unilateral hearing loss and does not fully rely on interpreters or ASL, this choice allowed us more options for her middle school. Although her middle school seems supportive, I have often had to reach out to both the school and the Deaf itinerant teacher, especially during the first two months, to ensure that her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is being followed, the proper equipment is used, and that teachers are reminded of her specific needs. I believe we have resolved most issues, but the process was much more challenging than what I experienced in elementary school.

The staff involved in the special education program are wonderful, as are her core teachers. However, they are not accustomed to having a hard of hearing student, which means they are not always fully aware of her needs. As Emily's mom, I am her biggest advocate. It is crucial for parents to stay engaged, get to know the teachers as much as possible, and maintain open and friendly communication. I attend every IEP meeting in person and encourage other parents not to be intimidated or afraid to remind staff of their legal responsibilities.

How have you helped your child connect with the Deaf community, and what difference has it made?

I've tried to encourage Emily to remain engaged with the Deaf community. I think it helps with her confidence and self-esteem to be around others with similar challenges.

Could you share a moment when you felt especially proud of your child or when you saw them thrive in a particular environment?

We attended a birthday party for a girl Emily's age that we didn't know very well. One of the moms in attendance was deaf. Emily went out of her way to sign with the mom. I was so proud of Emily for making this mom feel welcome and included. No one else there knew any sign language. It was only a few weeks into my own ASL education, so I could really only introduce myself and give her my name.

What's one piece of advice or wisdom you wish you'd had when you started this journey?

I wish I had known that it was not acceptable to use the term "hearing impaired." This term was printed on literature that I received from her physicians and even on her elementary school IEP. I used the term at my very first ASL class and was basically humiliated by the instructor as she called me out in front of the class. This was not her intent, but it was still embarrassing for me. I wish I had known better that this is considered offensive in the Deaf community.

>>> Things to Do <<<



WEST VIRGINIA HANDS & VOICES

Moms Night Inn Plus

March 29-30, 2025

Courtyard by Marriott • 460 Courtyard Street • Morgantown, WV

Moms Night Inn is a retreat for moms or female caregivers who are raising children of ALL ages who are deaf or hard of hearing. It's an amazing time to meet and share experiences with other moms who "get it".

Registration Fees:

Moms Night Inn March 29-30, 2025

\$25 shared room / \$50 private room / \$5 no hotel room

Friday Night Arrival March 28, 2025

\$50 shared room / \$100 private room

For more info or to reserve your spot scan the QR Code



OR

register online at:

<https://www.zeffy.com/ticketing/wv-hands-and-voices-moms-night-inn--2025>

Activities:

Informational Presentations

Pampering Sessions (manicure or massage)

Crafts, Games, Relaxing by the pool



WEST VIRGINIA DEAF SERVICE CENTER (WVDCS)

Deaf Coffee Chat

ASL activities, games, Deaf culture, and More!

All ages are welcome!

Charleston

Fridays, 5:30-8:30 PM

March 7, 2025, March 21, 2025

912 Young Street, Charleston, WV

Parkersburg

Tuesdays, 4:00-7:00 PM

March 11, 2025, March 25, 2025

2501 Dudley Ave., Parkersburg, WV

To follow WVDCS on scan the QR Code



>>> Media <<<



The Silent Child

The Silent Child is a British sign language short film, set in rural England. The film's message is to raise awareness of the struggles that deaf children face.

Scan the QR Code to watch this video.



You Don't know Everything, Jilly P!

Alex Gino (Author)

Jilly thinks she's figured out how life works. But when her sister, Emma, is born deaf, she realizes how much she still has to learn. The world is going to treat Jilly, who is white and hearing, differently from Emma, just as it will treat them both differently from their Black cousins.



Haben: The Deafblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law

Haben Girma (Author)

The incredible life story of Haben Girma, the first Deafblind graduate of Harvard Law School, and her amazing journey from isolation to the world stage.





LANGUAGE FIRST

March 16, 2025 from 1:30 - 3:30 pm ET

Unlocking Accessibility: Tools and Resources for Inclusive Engagement

During this presentation, participants will learn how to use a variety of free and affordable tools to allow them to create QR codes, use AI voiceover, embed images into their videos, create interactive activities to go with their material, and translation software. Software demonstrations include: QR Code Generator, Kapwing, WordReference, DeepL, Classwork, and Edpuzzle. **Workshop Fee: \$39**

March 30, 2025 from 1:30 - 3:30 pm ET

Deaf Students' and Interpreters' Positioning in Mainstream Classrooms: A Collaborative Approach

This workshop explores Deaf individuals' and interpreters' perspectives on the interpreters' role and approaches to working together, which were taken from individual and group interviews. This workshop highlights issues interpreters and Deaf students face, such as role confusion and conflict. **Workshop Fee: \$39**

These webinars will be hosted via Zoom and offers 0.20 ASHA CEUs and 0.20 RID CEUs. Only participants who attend the live event will receive a certificate of attendance. Participants who attend the entire webinar and fill out the self assessment form will be considered eligible to earn ASHA CEUs.

For additional information or to register, go to <https://language1st.org/events>

OR

Scan the QR Code



THE MOOG CENTER

For Deaf Education *Where Children Talk*

April 2, 2025, 7:00 PM CT

Working with Families: Why Empathy is Important

Virtual Early Intervention Workshop Series
Presented by Betsy Moog Brooks and Liz Fales

Early intervention providers work closely with families during a critical and highly emotional time. It is essential for providers to engage using empathy to strengthen or develop rapport. This presentation will review the differences between empathy and sympathy in order to connect with families to improve outcomes for their children.

For additional information or to register, go to <https://www.moogcenter.org/workshops/early-intervention-informational-series>

OR

Scan the QR Code



MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

American Sign Language (ASL) Summer 2025

ASL I June 16 - 20, 2025 • ASL II June 21 - 24, 2025 • ASL III June 20 - 24, 2025

Courses will be offered on the campus of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind, located in Romney, West Virginia. Housing is available at no cost to the student.

Combined, all three instructors have more than 50 years of professional experience in the field. These courses are fun and incredibly valuable. You will be amazed at what you can learn in just a few days!

\$250 for three credit hours • Seating is limited • Get on the waiting list today!

Co-Sponsors: MU - DHH Teacher Certification Program | WVSDDB | WVDOE-OSP

For additional information contact Julie Barie barie1@marshall.edu 304-546-8499





2025 EARLY HEARING DETECTION AND INTERVENTION CONFERENCE

Pittsburg, PA
March 9-11, 2025

The EHDI Conference provides key stakeholders an opportunity to identify areas of concern, promote collaboration, and share best practices. Join with other professionals and parents intent on improving early hearing screening, diagnosis, and intervention systems for infants/young children and their families.

Who Should Attend:

- State EHDI program staff members
- Audiologists
- Physicians and other Health Care Providers
- Families of children with hearing loss
- Early Intervention Specialists
- Speech-Language Pathologists
- Advocates
- Representatives from the major organizations working with EHDI programs
- Students

For additional information or to register, go to <https://ehdiconference.org>

OR

Scan the QR Code



2025 LANGUAGE FIRST CONFERENCE

Tacoma, Washington
April 22-24, 2025

Language First aims to educate and raise awareness about American Sign Language (ASL)/English bilingualism and the importance of a strong first language foundation for Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children.

The Language First Conference is an opportunity for professionals who work in deaf education to gather and learn best practices for working with Deaf and hard of hearing children utilizing an ASL-English bilingual approach.

This conference is offered for 1.1 ASHA CEUs and 1.1 RID CEUs. Only participants who attend the live event will receive a certificate of attendance. Participants who attend the entire webinar and fill out the self assessment form will be considered eligible to earn ASHA CEUs.

For additional information or to register, go to <https://language1st.org/events>

OR

Scan the QR Code



WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF 44TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Canaan Valley Resort, Davis, West Virginia
August 7-10, 2025

TREASURE OF RESOURCES!

Come join us for a weekend full of resources, socialization, and fun!

- Friday and Saturday Night Socials
- Saturday Evening Entertainment By Patrick Fisher (ASL Stories)
- Saturday Lunch
- Workshops
- General Assembly
- Exhibits/Resources

For additional information or to register go to <https://www.wvad.org>

OR

Scan the QR Code

