

State Senator John Bell, 13th District
Chairman
Board of Visitors
Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

Re: BOV Meeting, July 20, 2023

Dear Sir,

I reviewed the video of the July 20th Board of Visitors meeting posted on YouTube and I was disturbed by how this meeting proceeded, especially as it reached the end of the agenda.

When the floor was open for comments each speaker had a ONE minute limit (down from the original scheduled three). Deaf visitors had to cram their planned 3-minute comments into one minute in their Native American Sign Language (ASL). That was nigh impossible. In spoken language, the speaker might gabble and still be barely understood. But ASL is a visual language and must include the focus of the speaker and audience which takes time. Even with an ASL interpreter, one must switch from voice, hearing, eyes, and hands and body (physical formation). And you ask for a 3-minute utterance to be delivered in one!

So did the comments of the Deaf public carry any weight with the BOV on that day? Probably not, because your understanding of their one-minute message meant nothing!

I know Pat Trice personally and prior to her job as Superintendent of VSDB, she taught interpreting courses. Any honest teacher of interpreting knows that it is very difficult to interpret the speaker's content on point in ONE

minute. I was surprised that Ms. Trice did not step in and advocate for the ASL users during the Public Comment period. I may be forgiven in thinking that the only way to prevent people from making uncomfortable statements is to shorten the length of time in which to make them.

There is more from my take on the video of the meeting, not just on the Public Comment period.

a) When a BOV member states to the tax payers (us) that her staff is not required to respond to all letters, emails, and messages that is an insult. It suggests our voices are swept under the rug (not worth bothering about).

b) The security officers who were noticeably equipped with weapons raised concern. Like I already pointed out, Deaf people interpret the world through their eyes, so they were led to believe security expected a riot from the Deaf public (who were already upset) at the meeting. Really!!! Clearly somebody had tried to make mountains out of mole hills. Disgusting!

I trust VSDB BOV will take my message to heart. It is not mine alone.

Sincerely

Roberta Dietz

August 16, 2023