**PENNSYLVANIA**

# **PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

**Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265**

Public Meeting held July 11, 2019

Commissioners Present:

Gladys Brown Dutrieuille, Chairman

David W. Sweet, Vice Chairman

Norman J. Kennard

Andrew G. Place

John F. Coleman, Jr.

Pennsylvania Telecommunications Relay M-00900239

Service Advisory Board

**OPINION AND ORDER**

**BY THE COMMISSION:**

The Pennsylvania Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) is a communications service regulated by the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission (Commission) that offers a person with disabilities the ability to communicate “by wire or radio with a hearing individual in a manner that is functionally equivalent to the ability of a person who does not have a disability to communicate using voice communication services by wire or radio,” *i.e.*,access to the Public Switched Telephone Network in the same manner as a person without disability.[[1]](#footnote-2) TRS offers persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or have difficulty speaking three ways to connect to the service using various means: Traditional Telephone Relay, Video Relay and Internet Relay. Users who access TRS by telephone simply dial 7-1-1 to connect to a skillfully-trained Communications Assistant, or CA, who follows a strict code of ethics and confidentiality for telephone TRS communications. The CA then relays messages to the other person. TRS is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

By Order entered May 29, 1990 (*May 29, 1990 Order*), the Commission established the Telecommunications Relay Service Advisory Board (TRS Advisory Board) for the purpose of reviewing the success of TRS in Pennsylvania. The TRS Advisory Board was also assigned the task of identifying any additional improvements which might need to be implemented to ensure the continued success of the TRS program. The TRS Advisory Board is composed of the following representatives: Hamilton Relay Inc. (Hamilton Relay) (1 representative who may serve unlimited terms); Hamilton Telephone Company d/b/a Hamilton Telecommunications (Hamilton Telephone) (1 representative who may serve unlimited terms);[[2]](#footnote-3) the Pennsylvania Telephone Association (1 representative who may serve unlimited terms); the Commission (2 representatives who may serve unlimited terms); the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry’s Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH) (1 representative who may serve unlimited terms); the Telecommunications Device Distribution Program (TDDP) implementing entity (1 representative who may serve unlimited terms); and representatives from the community of persons who are, or who have experience with, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or those with language and speech disorders or with a disability that impacts their access to telecommunications services (7 representatives who may serve up to three, two-year consecutive terms).[[3]](#footnote-4) The TRS Advisory Board meets quarterly in Harrisburg and functions as a user group providing guidance in such areas as problem solving and future enhancements.

The TRS Advisory Board By-Laws provide for seven representatives from the community of persons who are, or who have experience with, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, those with language and speech disorders, or those with a disability that impacts their access to telecommunications services to serve on the TRS Advisory Board. The nominee as a public member for the TRS Advisory Board for the two-year term ending July 11, 2021, is Kevin J. Cohen.

Mr. Cohen is a veteran of the United States Army and a recipient of the Army Commendation Medal. He has a service-connected hearing loss and is a longtime consumer of relay services. He is also a speech language pathologist who specializes in working with people whose natural speech does not meet their daily communication needs. Many of the people that Mr. Cohen supports are also consumers of relay services for Speech-to-Speech and Hearing Carryover services. Additionally, Mr. Cohen is a member of the Commission’s TRS Task Force that is conducting a comprehensive review of TRS and the associated TDDP.[[4]](#footnote-5) Mr. Cohen’s expertise, input, and service to the TRS Board would prove beneficial to the TRS Board; **THEREFORE,**

**IT IS ORDERED:**

1. That the appointment of Mr. Kevin J. Cohen to the Pennsylvania Telecommunications Relay Service Advisory for the two-year term ending July 11, 2021 is approved.

2. That a copy of this Opinion and Order be served on:

Kevin J. Cohen

2612 Poplar Street

Philadelphia, PA 19130

** BY THE COMMISSION,**

Rosemary Chiavetta

Secretary

(SEAL)

ORDER ADOPTED: July 11, 2019

ORDER ENTERED: July 11, 2019

1. 35 P.S. § 6701.2; *see also* 35 P.S. § 6701.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Hamilton Relay is the certificated jurisdictional provider for intrastate TRS in the Commonwealth. *See* Docket No. A-2014-2447601. Hamilton Telephone is the contractual provider for intrastate Captioned Telephone Relay Service in the Commonwealth. *See* Docket No. A-311355. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. At a special meeting held on April 12, 2019, the TRS Advisory Board amended its By-Laws to include, *inter alia*, the addition of the TDDP implementing entity as a representative of the TRS Advisory Board and the expansion of the number of terms the community representatives may serve from two to up to three, two-year terms. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. By Order entered February 27, 2019, the Commission established the TRS Task Force at Docket Nos. P-2015-2484229, M-00900239, and M-2018-2640814. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)