

PENNSYLVANIA TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY SERVICE/TRS ADVISORY BOARD

Commonwealth Keystone Building

400 North Street

Harrisburg, PA 17120

March 13, 2024, First Quarter Meeting Minutes

Virtual Platform Teleconference Using MS Teams

ATTENDEES & AFFILIATIONS

Board Members

Amy Goldman, Chairperson,
Past President, US Society for Augmentative & Alternative Communication/USSAAC, 2023-2024. Member; Board of Directors member of National State Boards of Examiners in Speech and Language Pathology and Audiology. Public Member

Kay Tyberg, Secretary
USA HLAA member; President, HLAA-Blair County PA Chapter; National Association of the Deaf (NAD) member; Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of Deaf (PSAD) Lifetime member; National Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA) member; etc. Public Member.

Sandi McNally
Assistant Director, TechOwl, Institute on Disabilities Temple University

Melissa Hawkins
Director, PA Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing within PA Labor and Industry

Christa Cervantes
Pennsylvania Account Manager, CapTel and TRS, Hamilton Relay

Steve Samara
Pennsylvania Telephone Association

Public Member Vacancy: 3

TRS STAFF & GUESTS

Eric Jeschke,
Public Utility Commission (PUC) (BTUS)

Melissa Derr
PUC (BTUS)

Matt Hrivnak
PUC Bureau of Services

Denise McCracken
PUC Office of Communications

Tom Giannantonio
PUC BCS

Christine McGougal
Vice Chairman's Office of PUC Commission

Aaron Margolis
PUC Office of Communications

John Paul Rogers
PUC Telephone Utility Services

Spencer Nahf
BTUS

Aaron Margolis
PUC Office of Communications

David Screven
Law Bureau of the PUC

Joel Cheskis
PUC Chairman Legal Assistant to Commissioner

Lillian Harris
PUC Commissioner Legal Assistant

Kayla Rost
PUC Commissioner Legal Assistant

Laura Grassia
TDDP Program Manager, Institute on Disabilities, Temple University

Jenny Pearson
Outreach Coordinator, Hamilton CapTel

Thaddeus Graham

Board Members Absent:

Amy Goldman
Matt Hrivnak
Steve Samara

Outreach Coordinator, Hamilton Relay

Legal Advisor to the Board:

Tiffany Tran
Law Bureau of the PUC

David Screven
Law Bureau of the PUC

Sign Language Interpreters:

Jessica Bentley-Sassaman
Kathy Zimmerman

CART/Real Time

Archive Reporting and Captioning

Call to Order

Kay Tyberg, Secretary chaired the meeting on behalf of Amy Goldman in her absence for the First Quarter of the TRS/PUC Advisory Board meeting on Wednesday, March 13, 2024. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m.

Virtual Platform Etiquette Protocols

While conducting Virtual Platform meetings the board established appropriate protocols to adequately accommodate the needs of those with hearing loss, deafblind, and speech disabilities with hearing assistive technology communication mode for attendees. We ask for everyone's cooperation:

- a) Articulate clearly when speaking,**
- b) face and look into the camera's headshot when speaking to allow those who rely on lipreading to see you,**
- c) avoid backlighting the background,**
- d) one person speaks at a time when called upon,**
- e) to assure accuracy raise your hand and say yah or nah during the voting process giving people with disabilities time to respond or to second a motion,**
- f) allow a minute for those using sign language to respond, and**
- g) before addressing the members unmute your audio and state your first name before speaking.**

OLD BUSINESS

Welcome/Introductions

Secretary, Kay Tyberg welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the First Quarter meeting. Kay Tyberg conducted the roll call. Our special guest is Neil McDevitt, Executive Director of Deaf Hard of Hearing Communication Centre/DHCC. Attendees present are Christa C., Missy Derr, Graham, Laura,

Melissa, Denise, Jenny, Matt, Steve Samaro, Tiffany, Kayla, Lillian, Tom G., Spencer, Sandy M., Joel, Melissa H., Thad, Jessica (interpreter) and Kathy Zimmerman (interpreter). Excused are Amy Goldman, and Eric Jeschke.

Chairperson’s Report

There was no Chairperson’s Report from Amy Goldman.

Secretary’s Report/Approval of the Minutes

The advisory board’s meeting minutes were reviewed for corrections or comments. Kay Tyberg asked for a motion to approve the December 2023 minutes. Christa Cervantes made a motion with a correction to Cindi Brown’s name, seconded by Sandi McNally. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Report of the Telecommunication Device Distribution Program (TDDP) including Wireless (WEI) by Laura Grassia

The Telecommunication Device Distribution Program (TDDP) includes Wireless equipment distribution and support services whereas Laura Grassia reported the TDDP Report primarily focuses on outreach projects.

This report is from October through December 2023. Below is an overview.

Quarterly Stat	Counties	Statistics
Applications from PA counties	16 out of 91 within Philadelphia	91
Eligible & Device Applicants		71
Device Recipients	26	64 (unduplicated consumers)
Devices given out		66
Outreach Events & Consumer Education		
Two Statewide events	19	30 events
➤ ODHH Hearing Loss Expo		
➤ Walk for Hearing at		
➤ Philadelphia Navy Yard		
Device distribution		
➤ Vision		75%
➤ Hearing Loss		16%
➤ Other		9%
Social Media Posts		125,000
Customer Satisfaction with the device	7.75 Hrs.	100%
Assistive Technology Assistance		9 people
Survey Satisfaction Response Rate		75%

Kay Tyberg asked for TDDP materials to be mailed to her for public distribution with clients. Others can request the same.

The board is aware the Affordable Conductivity Program [ACP] has sort of "stalled". The good news is BlindShell Company has introduced a new free wireless monthly service for the blind community and beyond. BlindShell offers free service, five gigabytes of data per month, and unlimited talk/text options. The consumer will obtain a free SIMS card and the option of keeping your existing phone. If ACP does return, they will likely transition consumers to sign up for BlindShell. This is a golden opportunity for the disability community to obtain BlindShell at no cost.

Hamilton CapTel Outreach Report by Jenny Pearson

Jenny Pearson provided an in-depth report for the quarter on Hamilton's TRS Outreach. Jenny continues to meet new associates and partners. Jenny has been navigating her way across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In December Jenny did an exhibit at the Reading Royals Ice Hockey game for their Hearing Loss Awareness Night. Hamilton CapTel and the Hearing Loss Association of America/HLAA of Pennsylvania partnered in broadcasting the event. The hockey organization plans to reach out to Hamilton Relay at future events.

Once again, Hamilton Relay participated in the 2024 PA Farm Show in January. Jenny and Thad provided an in-depth report.

Hamilton CTRS Report by Thad Graham

Hamilton Telephone Company d/b/a Hamilton Telecommunications is the contracted Captioned Telephone Relay Services (CTRS) provider throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. CTRS is like its counterpart's traditional relay service with an added feature that allows consumers to receive captions on their telephone with the ability to hear what the caller is saying.

Thad explained in November he attended the Pennsylvania Association for the Blind Conference trying to create, and desirable relationship with the deaf/blind community. It was a wonderful conference. Thad was invited to several senior centers in Cambria County which were productive. Potential health fairs are coming up to put on our calendars. As Jenny mentioned we had a booth at the PA Farm Show. It was a dynamic statewide annual event and Thad had plenty of interaction with individuals.

Broadband Report by Laura Grassia

The Pennsylvania Broadband staff and TIA member, Nicole Ugarte visited Tech Owl new community space at Temple University. The broadband group was impressed with the new area and equipment offered.

The broadband workgroup has ceased its meetings. A report is being compiled and Laura will provide the report when released. Laura is encouraging the report to be made accessible for a screen reader as the draft version is wordy and has numerous graphic images that cannot be converted to the screen reader.

Further discussion was related to satellite internet vs. internet for broadband.

Hamilton CapTel telephones enable the caller to use two options; a captioner (enables a captioner to correct a mistake during the dialogue) or automatic/AI captions (corrections cannot be made), but the captions are accurate. Melissa Hawkins provided insight from a deaf, hard-of-hearing, or speech impairment stating AI captioning is not fully accurate. Full access must be available for people with hearing loss. Neil McDevitt added several deaf AI personnel have shared there is not enough reliable data for AI usage by the deaf. He will discuss this in his presentation.

Guest speaker – Neil McDevitt, DHCC Executive Director

Mr. McDevitt is the executive director of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communication Centre/DHCC. Their office is in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. DHCC is a nonprofit organization serving the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind community. DHCC's primary focus is on an interpreting agency for southeast Pennsylvania. This brings in 90 to 95% of DHCC's revenue. DHCC partners with other interpreting agencies. DHCC provides an opportunity for the hearing loss community to connect with the appropriate sign language interpreters for the needs the person has. It's customer satisfaction. Nine of the 15 full-time employees' primary task is working with interpreting referral services. Since COVID-19/Pandemic the organization has utilized remote virtual platforms for the past four years.

The second project is developing an accurate database of the Deaf, hard of hearing, and DeafBlind in southeast Pennsylvania. Neil shares the organization's administrator who provides grants or funds, "How many people do you serve?" Pennsylvania State does general approximation of possible hearing loss population, however, there is not a systematic accurate database for services provided by nonprofit organizations serving the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind. In acquiring funding, business entities lean on statistics to determine giving.

A project Mr. McDevitt and his staff are working on is trying to get Pennsylvania an aggregation of data composed of a breakdown of ASL and other sign language users, data on captioned telephone users, VRS users, amplified telephone users, mobile app usage, etc. All Deaf, deaf, hard of

hearing, and deafblind should be accounted for by nonprofit organizations to utilize funding. The regulations under FCC are protective of every individual under the law. DHCC would appreciate the TRS/PUC Advisory Board to write a letter to FCC, the Public Utility Commission, Disability Rights Network, and state legislators to enact a reliable system/database that enables accountability by zip code or otherwise without disclosing confidential information. All hearing loss organizations in the state need a way to aggregate data to obtain funding and have measurable outcomes. Neil named a specific contact at FCC who does have the data. FCC has told Neil there is not enough demand for this type of information.

Another issue being addressed now is the amendment of Act 57. We have a couple of senators proposing those amendments. Further details can be provided.

PUC attorney, Tiffany Tran advised Mr. McDevitt and reminded the board cannot write a letter to FCC. However, the board can draft a recommendation to send to the PUC commissioners and the commissioners can contact the FCC requesting relief of information.

PA TRS Quarterly Update Report by Christa Cervantes

Christa Cervantes provided the Pennsylvania TRS Quarterly Report. Pennsylvania caption telephone relay services and traditional relay services telephone are doing well. There is close to 100% performance depending on the months. A PowerPoint slide shows how many caption telephones were used over 12 months. She explained the customer communication circumstances where there are hangups and wrong numbers. Hamilton has tried different approaches to resolve issues without much success.

Broadband and Telecommunications – Joel Cheskis

Joel Cheskis replaced Joe Witmer, who retired in September 2023. Joel counsels the PUC Chairman Steve DeFrank on telecommunication and broadband issues. In addition, Joel is involved in the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority under Chairman DeFrank. The good news is broadband acquired billions of dollars from federal funding. The funding happened mostly after the Infrastructure Investment Job Act [II JA] resulting from the COVID-19/pandemic. The funds are in the process of being awarded toward developing and further deploying broadband to the underserved and underserved areas. This is a 100% initiative deployment in Pennsylvania State in the next several years.

Those of you may be aware The Affordable Connectivity Program funding will conclude in May 2024, unless Congress reauthorizes funds. A grave concern is that 650,000 households rely on \$30/month Internet access. Meanwhile, Internet constituents need a backup plan for how they can continue to receive

Internet services. What alternate options do these people have? The program is a 'hot' topic in Washington, DC.

Public Members Recruitment – Denise McCracken

Denise McCracken briefly shared no updates on recruitment.

NEW BUSINESS

Neil McDevitt, DHCC Presentation

Neil McDevitt, executive director of Deaf Hard of Hearing Communication Centre. His presentation provided an overview of DHCC services.

2024 Meeting Dates

Our next MS Teams virtual meeting is Wednesday, September 11, 2024.

Virtual meetings will start at 9:30 a.m. The 2024 meeting dates are September 11 and December 4.

Public Comment

No comment was presented.

Meeting Adjourned

Kay Tyberg, secretary asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. A motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:25 a.m. by Christa Cervantes and seconded by Sandi McNally. The board unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Annita Kay Tyberg

Annita Kay Tyberg

Secretary

Rev. 05/22/24, 05/30/24, 05/31/24

