

PENNSYLVANIA TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY SERVICE/TRS ADVISORY BOARD

Commonwealth Keystone Building

400 North Street

Harrisburg, PA 17120

June 5, 2024, Second 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
HLAA National member; HLAA-Blair County PA Chapter President; 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; Say What Club, 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**~~
Melissa
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 Consumer Services

Denise McCracken
PUC Office of Communications

Tom Giannantonio
PUC Bureau of Technical Utility Services

Christine McGougal
Vice Chairman's Office of PUC Commission

Aaron Margolis
PUC Office of Communications

John Paul Rogers
PUC Telephone Utility Services

Spencer Nahf
Bureau of Technical Utility Services

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

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

Board Members Absent:

Amy Goldman

Matt Hrivnak

Steve Samara

Guest Speakers:

CART/Real Time

Archive Reporting and Captioning

Call to Order

Chairperson, Amy Goldman welcomed members and guests for the Second Quarter TRS/PUC Advisory Board meeting on Wednesday, June 5, 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) Before addressing the board, members please unmute your audio and state your first name before speaking,**
- b) articulate clearly when speaking,**
- c) one person speaks at a time when called upon by the chairperson,**
- d) face and look into the camera's headshot when speaking to allow those who rely on lipreading to see you,**
- e) avoid backlighting in the background,**
- f) allow time for members relying on the sign language interpreter to translate to the hearing loss person to communicate or cast their vote,**
- g) to assure accuracy raise your hand and say "yah" or "nay" during the voting process giving people with disabilities time to respond or to second a motion, and**
- h) while communicating live or virtual platform avoid wearing abstract or loud patterns due to those who experience vertigo.**

OLD BUSINESS

Welcome/Introductions

Amy Goldman welcomed everyone. Amy Goldman administered the roll call, requesting board members to introduce themselves, followed by PUC staff,

interpreters, and guest(s) present. Guests were Bobby Anderson, Bureau of Consumer Services, and Skye, our captioner for CART. Jenny from Hamilton Relay is unavailable due to another assignment.

Chairperson’s Report

No report from Chairperson Amy Goldman.

Secretary’s Report/Approval of the Minutes

The advisory board’s meeting minutes were reviewed for comments/corrections. There were no modifications. Kay Tyberg asked for a motion to approve the March meeting minutes. Amy Goldman made a motion to accept the minutes as is. Christa Cervantes seconded the motion. The board unanimously approved the March meeting minutes.

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

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

The summary covers January-June 2024. An overview is provided:

Item	Stats for Qtr.	Counties	Statistics
Applications from PA counties Eligible & Device Applicants	113	44	91
Device Recipients	96 out of 113	26	85 (unduplicated consumers)
Devices given out [Three out of 93 equipment recipients were people between the ages of 100 and 104.]	93 pieces *3		For the 85
Outreach Events & Consumer Education – Jan thru March			
Two Statewide events	809 People	17	22 events
➤ PA School for the Deaf Transition Fair			
➤ ???			
Device distribution			
➤ Vision			69%

- Hearing Loss 23%
- Other 8%
- Social Media Posts 125,000
- Press Release 400,000

Customer Satisfaction with the device	7.75 Hrs.	100%
Assistive Technology Assistance		9 people
Consumer Survey Response		100%
Survey Satisfaction Response Rate		90%
Highly Satisfaction Response	Over 50%	80%

It is noteworthy to share Laura received a call from a woman with a speech disorder who is unable to speak on the phone she utilized the relay system to contact Laura. Laura has heard from consumers who are 90 to 100 years old. This is a phenomenal example of effective communication and outreach.

Hamilton CapTel Outreach Report by Jenny Pearson

Due to Jenny Pearson’s absence because of another Hamilton Relay commitment, Christa Cervantes provided the Hamilton Relay’s CapTel Outreach Report for February, March, and April. Jenny continues expanding her contacts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania such as the workforce development and businesses.

In April, Jenny participated in the PA School for the Deaf’s Resource Fair and Transition Fair. She attended and interacted with the Brandywine Active Aging group. In addition, Jenny joined Laura G. (TechOwl’s New Community Space at Temple University event) at the tactile open house which was well attended. A presentation was presented to the HIV Housing Transitional Group for consumers to become familiar with the telephone. Jenny did outreach at Montgomery, Adams, and Lehigh Valley County Area Offices on Aging.

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 has become a familiar face in western Pennsylvania. He has been in Erie, PA. A presentation was made at the University of Pittsburgh first-year audiology students, Mt. Aloysius, and the Commonwealth University of PA ASL classes. A virtual remote presentation was done with the Jefferson Support

Group. Additional presentations were given at multiple senior facilities and senior centers.

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.

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.

Christa provided the board with two graphs indicating telephone usage plateau from January 2023 to February 2024. Then from February to April 2024, there is a downturn. Normally telephone hang-ups are high, but they were slightly higher during this period. No data indicates why the downturn but several factors could contribute to this; a) people are no longer with us, b) consumer's lack of physical limitations to use the phone, c) analog to digital transition, d) consumers have migrated to the Internet, and e) other unforeseen reasons.

Broadband and Telecommunications – Joel Cheskis

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.

Joel has good news and bad news. The Affordable Connectivity Program funding expired in May 2024. Full consumer funding ran out in April, and

partial payment ended in May. Congress has not been able to renew the funding although 23 million Americans nationally benefited including a million Pennsylvanians. On the bright side, the Pennsylvania General Assembly has introduced H.B. 2195, and the specifics are unknown at this time. However, the PA Broadband Development Authority awarded \$200 million in federal funding to be dispersed to 50 broadband deployment projects in the state. Investors are matching this amount increasing the monetary value to \$400 million. There are approximately 250,000 households in Pennsylvania that do not have Internet access.

Public Members Recruitment – Denise McCracken

Denise McCracken reported the PUC has not received any new applicants for public members. A productive discussion and brainstorming followed with several potential ways to promote widespread recruitment.

NEW BUSINESS

Office of Communications – Tom Charles

Tom Charles, Communications Director, clarified in detail the department's role to the board and guests.

The Consumer Advisory Council [CAC] is under the Public Utility Commission. The CAC works under PUC the same way the TRS Advisory Board makes recommendations to the commissioners. The consumer education staff provide outreach services including Be Utility Wise Conferences. The CAC suggested The Office of Communications share a presentation with the Deaf and HOH Community and the TRS/PUC Advisory Board. Tom stated there have been cases about rate increases (23) recently. Communications and other Bureaus attend public input hearings to provide education to concerned consumers. The Office of Communications provides fact sheets and a QR code for consumer access to make complaints. Tom shared with the board the development of several documents available to the public. The Office of Communications has four key responsibilities: a) public outreach, b) employee communication and engagement, c) media relations, and d) communications technology.
[Attachment]

Deaf/deaf/Hearing Loss/Deafblind Statistical Data

At our first quarter meeting, guest speaker, Neil McDermott asked our advisory board to assist in requesting accurate data from our government on accurate statistical accounts of individuals with hearing loss, Deaf, or Deafblind. Members of the board and PUC staff discussed legitimate ways to approach the

commissioners to encourage FCC's cooperation in acquiring measurable data, allowing hearing loss community organizations to obtain funding for further outreach without disclosing any personal information. When this issue is supported and resolved it will help TRS/PUC, TDI, support groups, and the hearing loss community access funds through grants. This has been an ongoing roadblock for disability groups' desire to improve programs, strategic planning, and outreach. This has been a problematic issue for many years due to being a minority. At our next advisory board meeting further discussion will be explored.

Surcharge Costs

Chairperson Amy Goldman inquired on the status of the surcharge.

2024 Meeting Dates

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

Virtual meetings will begin promptly at 9:30 a.m. Please log on sooner to set up your connection. The Fourth Quarter 2024 meeting date is 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

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Secretary

Rev. 08/17/24, 09/04/24

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