**PENNSYLVANIA**

# **PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

**Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265**

Public Meeting held August 23, 2018

Commissioners Present:

Gladys M. Brown, Chairman

Andrew G. Place, Vice Chairman

Norman J. Kennard

David W. Sweet

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 hearing, deaf, and hearing or speech impaired 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. (1 representative who may serve unlimited terms); Hamilton Telephone Company d/b/a Hamilton Telecommunications (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), and 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 (7 representatives who may serve up to two two-year consecutive terms). The Board meets quarterly in Harrisburg and functions as a user group providing guidance in such areas as problem solving and future enhancements.

The *May 29, 1990 Order* requires one representative from the ODHH to serve on the TRS Board. Article V, Section 5 of the TRS Advisory Board By-Laws provides that members from the ODHH may serve unlimited terms on the TRS Advisory Board. ODHH has nominated Ms. Melissa Hawkins to serve on the TRS Advisory Board for an unlimited term. The TRS Advisory Board supported her nomination. Accordingly, this Order shall memorialize the appointment of Ms. Melissa Hawkins to the TRS Advisory Board for an unlimited term.

Ms. Hawkins serves as the Director of the ODHH. As noted in the agency’s website, the ODHH is an office within the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry that serves all 67 counties. ODHH is a “first stop” on the path to learn about anything and everything related to hearing loss, such as services, technology, sign language interpreters, or laws that require equal access for people who are deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing.

ODHH provides three primary services, represented by the acronym **AIR:** (1) **ADVOCATE** for people with hearing loss who are not receiving proper services from government or private agencies; (2) distribute **INFORMATION** and answer questions on issues relevant to people with hearing loss; and (3) **REFER** people to appropriate organizations. ODHH is ready to serve as liaison, open doors, explain procedures and make referrals. ODHH also provides administrative support to the [Advisory Council for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing](https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/odhh/council/Pages/default.aspx), also established by [Act 1997-37](https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/odhh/council/Pages/ACT-1997-37.aspx). On these bases, we conclude that Ms. Hawkins will be a beneficial addition to the TRS Board and the residents it serves; **THEREFORE,**

**IT IS ORDERED:**

1. That the appointment of Ms. Melissa Hawkins to the Pennsylvania Telecommunications Relay Service Advisory for an unlimited term is approved.

2. That a copy of this Opinion and Order be served on the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry’s Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing and Ms. Melissa Hawkins.

 **BY THE COMMISSION,**

Rosemary Chiavetta

Secretary

(SEAL)

ORDER ADOPTED: August 23, 2018

ORDER ENTERED: August 23, 2018

1. 35 P.S. § 6701.2; *see also* 35 P.S. § 6701.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Hamilton Relay has replaced AT&T, the previous service provider, as the current certificated TRS service provider for Pennsylvania and is the contracted Captioned Telephone Relay provider for Pennsylvania. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)