

**Montana Telecommunications Access Program**  
**Minutes: Full Committee Meeting**  
**November 19, 2015**  
**Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities Office**

**Committee Members Present:** Linda Kirkland, Char Harasymczuk, Ron Bibler, Cheryl Dickens, Marilyn Daumiller, Jim Marks, Tina Shorten, Drew Arnot, Julia Saylor

**Committee Members Absent:** Tyler Pert, Chris Caniglia, Peggy Williams

**MTAP Staff Present:** Barbara Varnum, Steve Johnson,

**MTAP Staff Absent:** Julianna Whittaker

**Supporting and Contributing Persons Present:** Emilie Banasiak, Hamilton Outreach; Lisa Furr, Hamilton Account Executive; Lisa Gault, MTAP temp assistant, Karie Whitlock, DET Fiscal; Trisha Smith and Stella Woodrum, Sign Language Interpreters.

**Meeting called to order:**

Ms. Kirkland called the meeting to order.

Introductions were made, with particular attention to the new members, Marilyn Daumiller and Tina Shorten.

**Approval of Minutes:**

The minutes from the August 2015 meeting was approved as written after Ms. Kirkland asked for comments and none were offered.

**MTAP Director's Report: Barbara Varnum**

Ms. Varnum began by discussing the voucher program that MTAP is considering using and she mentioned she has discussed this with some people at TEDPA and NASRA. The plan is between now and February to contact states that have been using the voucher program and really go in-depth on how this program is utilized in their respective states. The states that Ms. Varnum has been able to gather information from so far are Arizona, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Texas. Kansas did not respond to the survey. These states are members of TEDPA. Ms. Varnum mentioned that most of these state programs have a voucher program for everything, not just mobile devices. Three of the five states named have voucher programs for mobile devices, two of them don't. All five states that have voucher programs are owner states, not loaner states. Montana is a loaner state, which means MTAP loans out equipment for as long as the client needs it. Those states also don't have a training/evaluation system in place for handing out the devices.

The vouchers that these states use cover 95 percent of the cost or 2/3rds of the cost, depending on which state. Also one state based the cost coverage on the severity of the disability. The higher the severity of the disability, the higher the cost coverage was. Ms. Varnum commented that these states really do depend on the vendor and the client to determine which equipment is to be used. A con is that there's potential for fraud and sometimes the client might get equipment that is not a good match.

Ms. Varnum pointed out that she mainly focused on TEDPA states and out of 38 member states, 17 are covering mobile devices and Hawaii gives the option of either an iPhone or an Android and has a contract with Sprint relay. She will continue to research on the voucher programs that are being used in other states and gather more information before the next meeting.

Ms. Varnum reminded the committee that MTAP has a sole source contract with Teletex for mobile devices and they offer iPhones and Jitterbugs which is a little option but she's aware that people would like more choices than just those two.

Discussion ensued with Ron Bibler requesting clarification on the research Ms. Varnum is doing relating to the voucher program and Ms. Varnum stating that she needs to make some decisions on how to address this in the upcoming equipment RFP and her main concern is to allow the clients to have choices and be able to choose a mobile device if they desire to.

Ms. Kirkland reminded the committee of the statute 53-19-306 that states "This program will provide specialized equipment and services to persons with disabilities. The purpose of the program is to furnish specialized telecommunications equipment to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and provide the relay services." Ms. Kirkland stated that if the program moves away from actually providing the equipment itself, one needs to address this particular statute and clarify it further. Discussion followed on this statute as Mr. Bibler felt that even if MTAP gives out vouchers, the intent of the statute is still met. Ms. Kirkland emphasized that discussion should be made with the department's attorneys to determine whether this law should be changed or not once the voucher program is confirmed.

Ms. Varnum posed a question to Ms. Kirkland about a letter from a DPHHS attorney dated about 2010 that she discovered regarding the voucher program and wondered if there had been discussion all along in the last five years about this and Ms. Kirkland confirmed that yes, it's been discussed for quite a while about initiating the voucher program to possibly replace the equipment distribution program.

Ms. Saylor questioned on whether the voucher program would change Montana to an owner state rather than a loaner state. Ms. Kirkland replied that the cell phone companies would determine whether it's a purchase or a loaner.

Ms. Varnum reiterated that she needs to make a decision about this for the upcoming equipment RFP and that it will be in place by May and she wants to make sure the mobile devices have a place in the RFP. Ms. Kirkland stated that the RFP can intend to have a multiple award contract (e.g., section for equipment and section for mobile devices).

Jim Marks added that mobile technology has really become mainstream with the ease people have in purchasing mobile devices like iPhones and Androids off the shelf so we need to stay relevant and have the structure in place as soon as we can. Ms. Varnum mentioned that she heard at the recent TEDPA conference that if we don't get on board with mobile devices the program will be irrelevant in five or ten years as that's where the world is going in that direction. She also stated since they started distributing mobile devices – they've primarily given out Jitterbugs as the population they serve is predominantly elderly. There is a need to do outreach to the younger population for mobile devices such as the iPhone and mini iPad as the elderly population prefer simpler devices. Ms. Varnum added that of the \$24,000 from their sole contract, so far they've spent \$13,800. The sole source contract expires in February. Ms. Varnum will submit another sole source for mobile devices to get us through until we receive bids via the RFP.

Ms. Basaniak and Ms. Furr stated that Hamilton is only a service provider but they work closely with Teletex and Teletex does have downloadable apps that the deaf/hard of hearing population can utilize as well as those with speech disabilities. Ms. Basaniak added that any time there is an Internet-based device, the money for the relay goes from the federal government to pay for that, not through the MTAP program.

Ms. Kirkland concluded that the general consensus is to move forward with the equipment RFP and include the possibility for mobile devices, multiple award if need be, single award if need be but with the understanding that a multiple award can be added if the criteria is met within the RFP. The main gist of having a voucher program is to give clients choices of equipment, be it mobile or otherwise. More discussion followed and Ms. Varnum assured that the RFP evaluation committee will be thorough with the wording on the equipment RFP.

Ms. Varnum, then, moved on to the next topic of discussion, regarding the electronic case management system that MTAP is currently using. A bid was received from Sockeye, verbally, not formally for \$135,000. Sockeye is a Microsoft Dynamic CRM product. Ms. Varnum emphasized that Sockeye is in full compliance with state procurement law and a competitive bid is not needed. It's already in the realm of current contracts. There will be customization to fit the needs of the MTAP office as it's a dot net application. Ms. Varnum added that a project manager by the name of Steve Oldham from DPHHS will be involved with setting this up for MTAP.

Ms. Kirkland made a motion that the committee vote to provide concurrence with the MTAP program to move forward with this endeavor and spend the \$135,000 and Ms. Harasymczuk moved and Ms. Dickens seconded. Passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Varnum brought up one more subject, her attendance at the NASRA, TEDPA conference and how much benefit she received from attending this conference. There was conversation at the conference about Internet caption phones that will be coming to the states. It's very new and not much is known about how this will be provided, who will pay and how many minutes this will use. Mr. Bibler added to this discussion with his experiences at the conference.

Ms. Kirkland concluded the director's report asking for any further questions and determining that it was a good time to break for lunch.

### **Hamilton Call Center Report: Lisa Furr, Account Manager**

Lisa Furr summarized that from 2014 to 2015 the average answer speed was .3 to 1.8 seconds. According to the FCC regulations, the answer speed needs to be within 3 seconds. From July 2015 to October 2015 the average answer speed was .5 to .9 seconds. In Montana the requirement is that all calls need to be answered 90 percent within 10 seconds. From 2014 to 2015 the percentage was within 93 to 98. From July 2015 to October 2015 the average answer speed was 97 to 98 percent.

TRS completed outbound calls both within and out of state at 79 percent for 2014. 8 percent was out of state, toll free calls were 13 percent and for international/900 calls, no calls made. For 2015, TRS was at 80 percent. 8 percent was out of state, toll free calls were 12 percent and no calls made internationally or for 900 numbers.

Ms. Furr stated that the majority of calls were with TTYs, 2,060; next most used is the voice carry over at 559 and third is voice only at 326. Total average of calls per month from 2014 to 2015 was 700. For the FY2015, about 750 calls were completed.

Total conversation minutes for 2014-2015 was 3500. For FY 2015 (four months) average is 3,000 conversation minutes.

CapTel traffic report for 2014-2015, average answer speed was 1 second to 1.5 seconds. For FY 2015 (July-October), average answer speed was .7 to 1.3. Average of answering within 10 seconds ranged from 95 to 98 percent. For CapTel outbound calls, intrastate is 82 percent, interstate is 3 percent. Only 80 calls made internationally and for the toll free numbers, 5 percent. No calls with the 900 number. For FY 2015, intrastate was 83 percent, interstate is 11 percent. Only 55 calls made internationally (zero percent) and toll free numbers came to 5 percent. No 900 information calls made.

Ms. Varnum queried about the caption minutes seemingly have gone down and Ms. Furr replied that yes the caption minutes have declined because people have more choices. CapTel numbers are not affected as they have increased. Discussion followed about whether there's a decline in distribution of CapTel phones. Mr. Bibler added that AT&T will be providing a new app called Real Time Text (RTT) in the future and this might also affect the number of calls since this new technology will be yet another option for people to use.

Ms. Furr closed her report and opened for questions. Ms. Shorten posed the question about why the difference between the FCC requirement and the state requirement in terms of speed in answering calls. Clarification was made that the state wanted better standards than the federal level.

### **Hamilton Relay Outreach Report: Emilie Basaniak**

Ms. Basaniak reported on her experience attending the Montana Speech and Hearing Association in Billings on October 15 through 17. She set up a booth there for Hamilton Relay and stated that there was a small turn out and not nearly enough time given to visit the booths. Ms. Basaniak was still happy with the results of that event as referrals were made and brochures picked up.

Ms. Basaniak also attended the My Youth Transition conference which is aimed at high school students with disabilities who are transitioning to college, jobs or trade schools. She was pleased with having opportunity to meet with a lot of organizations there and mentioned that there was interest in the speech to speech relay service which is one of the lesser known services that Hamilton provides. This is a service that does not require any special assistive technology, just a special Hamilton phone number that connects the caller with a communication assistant that is trained by a speech language pathologist to identify what the person with the speech difficulty is saying. Ms. Basaniak was happy to see the interest generated in this program at this conference.

Ms. Basaniak also attended Deaf Awareness Day in Great Falls in September and had the privilege of presenting Hamilton's Deaf Leader Award to Jeff Richards who is very active in the deaf community in the state of Montana. She concluded her report asking if there were any questions. None was raised.

### **Budget Report: Karie Whitlock**

Ms. Whitlock opened by welcoming the new members and mentioning that Marilyn is probably more familiar with the budget than she is. For the SFY 2016 the budget is at \$1,688,975 and the House bill appropriation is at \$913,975 which is what the legislature allows the program to spend within the fiscal year. This is broken down into \$247,792 for personnel service costs, \$666,183 for operational costs and \$775,000 in a language appropriation which is restricted in case the FCC mandate does come to the states in the future.

As of Oct. 31, 2015, 33 percent has been spent, \$222,957.

**Equipment Report:** Steve demoed the Proloquo2go app for the committee. This app is for those with speech or cognitive disabilities.

**Outreach Report:** Outreach has been minimal this past two months, due to Susan's absence.

Deaf, Deaf World: Lisa Furr, Lisa Gault and Emilie Banasiak facilitated. This was a fun and enlightening activity for all!

**DPHHS Legislature Report:** Jim Marks would like the committee to start thinking about possible changes to the program for the upcoming 2017 legislature. Jim would first submit any changes in the executive planning process (EPP). If it makes it through the EPP, Jim could bring it forward to the 2017 Legislature.

**Ms. Kirkland called for Old or Unfinished Business:** There was none.

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:50pm**