

Montana Telecommunications Access Program
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
May 17, 2018
MCDD - Helena

Committee Members Present: Drew Arnot, chair, Nick Domitrovich, Tom Thompson (by phone), Ron Bibler, Cam Tulloch, Jay Preston, Julie Saylor, Tina Shorten, Marilyn Daumiller, Lisa Cannon,

Committee Members Absent: Tyler Pert, John Pavao

MTAP Staff Present: Barbara Varnum, Steve Johnson, Lisa Gault, Richard Ballou

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Emilie Banasiak and Connie Phelps, Hamilton Relay, Trisha Smith and Stella Woodrum, sign language interpreters, Sheri Vukasin, financial manager/budget analyst

Meeting called to order:

Drew Arnot called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

A motion by Tina Shorten was made to approve the minutes and Tom Thompson seconded. Minutes were approved and Mr. Preston abstained as he was not present at the previous meeting.

Public Comment: No public comment – Bob Maffitt (director of the Independent Living Project in Helena) arrived later in the meeting to discuss about the partnership between the NFB Newline and MTAP. He explained what the Newline is, it's an assistive technology for individuals who are blind, low vision, have disabilities that functionally affect their ability to use print. It's a service sponsored by the National Federation for the Blind and gives access to newspapers, magazines and the TV guide. Mr. Maffitt is requesting that MTAP continue sponsoring the Newline as a consumer that uses the program. It's not only people with vision problems, a quadriplegic would benefit from the service if they cannot hold a newspaper or a magazine. He estimates about 180 people have signed up for the service. It's accessible by phone. It's not wholly dependent on the Internet but can be accessed via the Internet, via a smart phone, computer, or a landline.

MTAP Director's report: Barbara Varnum

Barbara Varnum opened with welcoming the two new members of the committee – Cam Tulloch and Lisa Cannon and mentioning that two people will be leaving, Julie Saylor and Marilyn Daumiller. Discussion ensued regarding trying to find someone to represent the largest service provider (Verizon) and maybe proposing a change in the language regarding that position on the committee. Jay Preston made a motion that the committee support the general idea of replacing the representative of the largest telecom provider with a representative from the wireless telecom industry in the state and that a specific proposal be brought to the August meeting so that we can see exactly what language we are proposing before we make a final approval. Ron Bibler seconded this motion. Vote was called and the motion was passed.

Ms. Varnum informed the committee that she received permission to post the job opening for her position as director of MTAP. The position description was revised and Drew Arnot and Mr. Bibler both looked at it and so did Nick Domitrovich. She will post it on the website for NASRA (National Association for State Relay Administrators) as well as on the state website. Mr. Arnot and Mr. Bibler will be on the interview team along with Ms. Varnum. Discussion ensued on who will be reviewing the applications.

She expressed how much she has enjoyed this job and loved working with the elderly population as she has never had that experience before. She is considering volunteering after she retires to continue working with the elderly.

Ms. Varnum reported on the new hire, Richard Ballou, and going on client trips with him. A committee member asked what his background was, and Richard replied that he worked for the Child Development Center in Missoula for two years working with children with autism. He has a B.A. in communication disorders. Ms. Varnum added that she will have Richard attend a sign language program at Western Oregon University in June. There is a scholarship through the RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) that pays for it. RSA is federal level affiliated with the Department of Education. Jay Preston made a motion that Richard be sent to Oregon for the program. Tina Shorten seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

She reported that Lisa Furr who was the Hamilton Relay account manager has resigned and Connie Phelps has taken her place. Ms. Varnum also stated that she did her annual report for the FCC with assistance from Connie. For the NASRA/TEDPA annual conference, she wants to encourage the new director to go to NASRA and perhaps having a committee member go along with the new director. Mr. Bibler mentioned that he plans to attend. Steve Johnson will go as well and Richard Ballou has a previous commitment so he cannot attend. Ms. Shorten moved to support having staff attend these national conferences and Mr. Preston seconded. The motion was passed. Mr. Domitrovich reminded that he has to get permission from the budget office for out of state travel.

Ms. Varnum moved on to discussing outreach. She will continue just using one TV station that does statewide coverage and a new commercial has been made about the iOS devices. MTAP does not pay for the commercial as it's part of the package with KTVH. They just charge for advertising for the year. Advertising will continue in newspapers across the state and going out face to face at conventions. The MTAP staff will go to the annual Family Learning Weekend at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind in June. MTAP traditionally participates in the arts and crafts activities with the kids and then do a presentation plus a table with applications and brochures and phone models.

A committee member suggested that the next commercial be with senior citizens on their Jitterbug Smart phones as she stated that people comment to her about the commercials and she thinks this avenue is effective in getting information out about MTAP.

Ms. Varnum moved on to the use of social media. She has asked for quotes from Devaney and Associates for running a Facebook page and KTVH. She has not received those quotes yet. If the committee chooses to go through Hamilton Relay, an amendment would be needed to add to the contract MTAP has with Hamilton Relay. MTAP can also contract directly with the agency the committee chooses to run the social media outreach. Mr. Preston made a motion that the committee generally endorse the idea of going forward to add this marketing presence on Facebook and in social media and reserve the precise decision as to how to do it until more information is gathered. Mr. Arnot seconded the motion. The motion was carried.

The last thing Ms. Varnum reported on is the Federal Poverty Level. It's the income guidelines for clients to be eligible for the program. It has to be changed every year and it's implemented in February. It's typically published towards the end of the year then in February a new submission is put in.

Ms. Varnum presented an award to Julie Saylor for her time served on the committee for ten years.

Budget Report: Sheri Vukasin

Sheri Vukasin reported that at the end of March the program had collected \$1 million and the expected revenue for the year is \$1.3 million so the program is on track. For expenditures, the program has spent about 57 percent of the projected expenses. Two major projected expenses haven't been taken out, one for the new vehicle for the MTAP office in Missoula which is \$25,000 (the vehicle hasn't arrived yet) and the NFB Newslines which is \$35,000 if approved at the end of this meeting. Discussion ensued regarding money set aside (775,000) for the FCC and Ms. Vukasin clarified that it's in the budget system itself, it's a language appropriation in House Bill

2, it's not a direct appropriation which means there is language specific to it that says if this cost comes across that there are funds to pay for it. There are restrictions around it, and it cannot be used for any other purpose other than if the costs are transferred from the federal level to the states. Ms. Vukasin stated that there has been ongoing concern for years on how much revenue the program brings in versus how much the program spends. The concerns are valid as in the past the legislature has taken funds away from this program and gave it to the Newborn Infant Screening program to get it up and running and another time a huge amount was taken and transferred to the general fund. Ms. Vukasin said that if the committee wants to make changes, the timing has passed for the 2019 legislature but the committee can work through the issues and decide what to do in terms of money being spent and what proposals the committee wants to take to the legislature. The period for submitting ideas to increase the spending limit is January through March of the non-session year. Ms. Varnum will be in touch with the budget committee and see who else would like to participate and brainstorm about MTAP's future.

Hamilton Relay Report: Emilie Banasiak and Connie Phelps

Connie Phelps opened with some information on Hamilton Relay's relationship to the state of Montana. Hamilton contracts with the state. There are two providers that bid on state contracts to provide relay services, one is Sprint and one is Hamilton. As the account manager, Ms. Phelps oversees the contract and ensures that the contract is being met so that the state is satisfied with what Hamilton is doing. Hamilton provides all the operations/operators. If there is a relay outage, they will contact the director of MTAP right away and work on resolving that. Ms. Phelps also takes part in outreach but she is not Emilie Banasiak's supervisor. One of Ms. Phelps' roles as account manager is to observe Ms. Banasiak once a year doing outreach.

Emilie Banasiak explained how her role as the outreach coordinator involves, presentations, exhibitions and meetings. She does six events in Montana that she has researched and brought up with Hamilton and the state administrators. Ms. Banasiak also does the award and scholarship programs. She mentioned that some of the equipment that MTAP provides, that Hamilton is the service provider, such as the communication assistants for the CapTels and the TTYs.

Ms. Phelps expanded on the communication assistants, by stating that Hamilton has training standards for the communication assistants and the FCC has rules of what they can or cannot do when relaying a call. Confidentiality is key. Both Ms. Phelps and Ms. Banasiak conducted a demonstration on TTYs for the committee as well as the CapTels. The 711 number to call relay is the same for every state, it connects to that state's relay system. Ms. Banasiak added that typically a relay center that goes through the landline is paid for by the State and if a relay service that goes through the internet is paid for by the Federal government. There is also another form of Internet captioned telephone that the Federal government pays for which is called Mobile Solutions and one can go to Hamiltonweb.com and sign up with a free online account with that and it can be used on a mobile device, free app on a smart phone, tablet or personal computer. She likes this option because one doesn't have to have a landline and she's never home so it makes sense for her.

They discussed the different types of relay such as hearing carryover, speech to speech and remote conference captioning.

MTAP Equipment Report – Steve Johnson and Richard Ballou

Barb Varnum decided not to have Steve Johnson and Richard Ballou do a report since Steve Johnson arrived late the night before from an extended period of absence from work.

DPHHS report: Nick Domitrovich

Nick Domitrovich reported that the Disability Employment and Transition (DET) division had to request a roughly 2.2 million supplemental to cover overspends from fiscal year 2017. In 2017 the division spent beyond the two-year limit in the first year. This was presented to the Legislative Finance Committee in February/March and no action was taken. Again, it was submitted the week prior to the MTAP committee meeting, still no

action taken. By law, they can transfer the money on June 10th. Mr. Domitrovich didn't think the division will need the full 2.2 million, more likely it will be 1.3 million.

Mr. Domitrovich mentioned the WIOA (Workforce Investment Opportunity Act) that was passed in 2014 by the U.S. Congress. This bill has changed the way the vocational rehabilitation department does things. There will be a conference between programs at the Department of Labor and OPI (Office of Public Instruction) and VR the following week. This conference is aimed at figuring how to work together to maximize employment opportunities to the individuals that are being served in these programs.

The last thing that's occurring on the state level is that the Disability Determination Services recently received a large amount of additional resources from the Social Security Administration. There will be eight new examiners in the fraud unit. It should expedite the process for individuals who rely on receiving SSI and SSDI.

On the Federal level, the President has appointed a man named Mark Schultz to be the RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) commissioner. Mr. Domitrovich feels this is a good choice based on Mr. Schultz' background and experience in assistive technology and he was the former president of CSAVR (council administrators of VR).

Two additional notes that Mr. Domitrovich brought up were: there's discussion of doing away with the sub-minimum wage in the U.S. Senate and a lot of conversation at the federal level and with different advocacy groups regarding the Housing and Urban Development proposing two changes (bills), one is called the Making Affordable Housing Work Act and the other is called Promoting Opportunities through Rent Reform Act. These bills place requirements and huge rent increases on subsidized housing.

Unfinished business

No unfinished business.

New business

Discussion ensued on funding the NFB Newslines. It was tied into the MTAP mission and statute on how to use funds by reasoning that disabled users were receiving this audio service over the telephone. Also, there can be an overlap of clients that MTAP serves that may also be using this service. Mr. Preston made a motion that MTAP fund this for another year. Mr. Bibler seconded. All were in favor except one so the motion carried.

Ms. Varnum brought up the issue of finding a new meeting room as the facility that MTAP has been using for the full committee meetings will no longer be available. A room will be reserved through the state as there are conference rooms available, and this will be confirmed prior to the next meeting in August.

The committee expressed gratitude to Barb Varnum for her service with MTAP since she is retiring the end of July and commendations were given to Marilyn Daumiller and Julie Saylor for the time they served on the committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:03 pm