

**Montana Telecommunications Access Program**  
**Minutes: Full Committee Meeting**  
**November 21, 2024**  
**2550 Prospect Ave.**  
**Disability Determination Services conference room**  
**Helena, Montana**

**Committee Members Present:** Lisa Cannon, chair; Tina Shorten, John Pavao, Ron Bibler, Barbara Varnum, Cam Tulloch, Ashlee Logan, Dana Kjersem, Bob Terwilliger (via Zoom), Tom Thompson (via Zoom), Michelle Owens (via Zoom)

**Committee Members Absent:** Lee Hazelbaker

**MTAP Staff Present:** Mary Taylor, Lisa Gault, Jeff Haley

**Supporting and Contributing Persons Present:** Sarah Seltzer, deputy administrator; Emilie Banasiak, Allison LaBrie and Lori Sporrer, Hamilton Relay (via Zoom); Hannah Stokes, budget analyst (via Zoom); Shawn Tulloch, VR counselor (via Zoom); Missy Grinnell and Trisha Smith, sign language interpreters; Lisa Lesofski, CART

**Meeting called to order:**

Lisa Cannon called the meeting to order.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Cam Tulloch moved to approve the August 2024 minutes and Tina Shorten seconded. Motion carried.

**MTAP Director's report: Mary Taylor**

In reference to the committee status, Mary Taylor mentioned that a plaque and a letter expressing appreciation for Sheri Odlin's service as the PSAP representative was mailed and Ms. Taylor reached out to a couple of people that Ms. Odlin thought would be interested in taking her place on the committee. One of the people Ms. Taylor contacted was interested so Ms. Taylor is waiting on that person to submit their application to the Governor's office.

For new applications, the average number of applications the MTAP office received last year was 13 applications per month. For this current year since July through October 31<sup>st</sup>, the average has been about 16 applications per month. Ms. Taylor credits this increase to the outreach that the team has been doing.

Regarding advertising, Ms. Taylor said that they continue to advertise during the MSU Bobcats and U of M Grizzlies games on KTVH. She has also started a three-month advertising campaign at the Cinemark theater in Helena that began on October 1<sup>st</sup> and will end on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Advertising will continue at the Helena Bighorns ice hockey games with signs and information on the boards. There will be new advertising regarding the agency name change from MTAP to Montana Accessible Communications (MTAC) statewide beginning in January 2025.

The MTAP team has been busy with outreach such as the Relay Friendly Business training that was done in October, in addition to Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley's visits of senior centers, attendance of the Governor's Conference on Aging, and the Montana Youth Transitions Conference. Ms. Taylor and Lisa Gault attended the veterans' service training fair and shared information at the Department of Transportation's Disability Conference. Also, the statewide Independent Living Council partnered with several agencies, including MTAP, to do an event in Poplar on the Fort Peck Reservation to promote the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); Mike Bouchard represented MTAP at this event.

MTAP has done seven Relay Friendly Business trainings so far, beginning in February 2022 to the recent one that was done on October 15, 2024. Ms. Taylor asked two certified Relay Friendly businesses to join the recent training and give the participants their perspective on the training. Michelle Owens of Blackfoot and a representative of the Libby Job Service joined to share their experiences with the training. The next training take place in the spring of 2025.

The MTAP Facebook page is doing well this quarter as the impressions, clicks, and likes have all increased. Ms. Taylor feels that the advertising has helped with the increase in numbers. The most popular unpaid advertising post was the one celebrating the International Day of Sign Language and the top-performing paid advertising post was the focus on the relay business story post. Ms. Taylor noted that during the election season, some of the television advertising was bumped so there was less advertising during the month of October.

There was also an increase in views regarding the MTAP website. Ms. Taylor looked at the report and it seemed that there were errors in two links where most people were coming in from another external source. That meant that someone was sharing the MTAP website page with the public from their page, but the link was broken so it caused an error. Ms. Taylor hopes this error will be resolved by the time the next report comes out.

All the contracts have been updated through the end of June of 2025; the Hamilton Relay contract continues through February of 2026.

Ms. Taylor worked with the legal department and with Hamilton Relay to add another clarifying checkbox on the remote conference captioning request form. It says "I understand that Remote Conference Captioning transcripts are not intended to be an official transcript for court proceedings and may not be considered legally admissible in a court of law. I further understand that if I decline to use the service offered that it will be my responsibility to make alternative arrangements."

The Administrative Rules have been adopted to update the 2023 income guidelines and change the name of the agency to Montana Accessible Communications (MTAC). This went in effect September 21, 2024. Ms. Taylor is planning to begin changing the name on the logo and ordering new products with the new name on the logo. She is now working on updating the income guidelines, based on the 2024 Federal Poverty Levels. She is also working on a huge change in the program Administrative Rules which will be discussed later in the meeting.

In reference to staff training, Mary did some trainings such as the Robert's Rules of Order and Legislative Budget Appropriations Process Training. Mary, Mike and Jeff will be attending the Tribal Relations training in December.

Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley attended the TEDPA (Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association) conference and Mary Taylor, Lisa Cannon, and Dana Kjersem attended the NASRA (National

Association for State Relay Administration) conference. Mary provided an update on the topics discussed at the recent NASRA conference. It was determined that both conferences will be held every other year in the future due to growing costs and the amount of time spent on planning. The next conferences will be in 2026.

### **Budget Report: Hannah Stokes**

Hannah Stokes reported on the state fiscal year 2025 budget totals for MTAP as of October 31, 2024.

Personal services	\$351,557
Operations	\$599,447
FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u><u>\$1,726,004</u></u>

### **Actual expenses through October 31, 2024**

MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (26% of the \$951,004)	\$246,555
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$28,906
Prior year expense	(\$51)
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$276,410</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through October 31, 2024

Personal services (28% of \$351,557 PS projected budget)	\$96,924
Operational expenses (24% of \$599,447 OP projected budget)	<u>\$149,630</u>
Total expenses (26% of \$951,004 total HB2 budget)	\$246,906

Revenue collected as of October 31, 2024 - \$819,576

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SFY 2025 actual expenses through October 31, 2024

Operating Expenses through October 31, 2024 - SFY 2025 - \$246,555

- Hamilton Relay Services – total expenditures \$9,635
- Outreach – total expenditures \$47,697
- Rent/Utilities – total expenditures \$15,794
- Travel – total expenditures \$1,834
- Supplies – total expenditures \$1,079
- Distribution Equipment – total expenditures \$24,264
- Other Expenses/Equipment – total expenditures \$2,451
- Communications – total expenditures \$2,314
- Repairs/maintenance (vehicles) – total expenditures \$933
- Other services – total expenditures \$11,263

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Actual costs for SFY 2025 indirect costs are \$28,906
- FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time.

## **DPHHS report –Sarah Seltzer**

Sarah Seltzer reported that the division is getting ready for the 2027 biennium legislative session that is coming up in January. The Governor's budget was posted the Friday previously to this meeting. There is a new proposal within that budget to increase the appropriation for MTAP. This would increase for the biennium to just over a million dollars for the MTAP budget. It remains to be seen what will happen to this during the legislative session, but it is encouraging that it made the Governor's budget as it takes a long process to have this proposal added. At the federal level, if anyone who accesses federal funds (not MTAP) they continue to operate under a continuing resolution so there has not been a full budget allotted. About every three months the agencies that get federal funds get notified what their federal budget looks like. Ms. Seltzer said it likely will continue through March 2025.

## **MTAP Equipment Report – Jeff Haley**

Jeff Haley referred back to the outreach report, noting that he has done outreach in different towns to visit senior centers. He also did the Health and Wellness Fair in Missoula with Emilie Banasiak. He discussed the vendors he saw at the TEDPA conference with the different new products – some that were presented to the committee the day prior to the meeting. There will be a demonstration via Zoom in December that the committee is encouraged to join. The product for that demonstration is a MouthPad – a Bluetooth-enabled device - that enables people who cannot use their hands. With this device they can use their tongue to manipulate the computer screen instead of a mousepad. He also learned during the conference that there are many forms of sign language as he saw a Japanese Professor with a Japanese sign language interpreter and crossing over to ASL interpretation. Mr. Haley also mentioned watching a deaf-blind person signing and seeing how tactile communication is performed.

Mr. Haley saw an amplified phone unit that might be a good fit for the clients they serve as the Panasonic 450 unit which is currently used by MTAP is becoming harder to get. Amplicom has come out with a new model that has a keyboard and an auxiliary unit.

## **Hamilton Relay Report – Lori Sporrer, Allison LaBrie and Emilie Banasiak**

Allison LaBrie is the new account manager for Montana Relay, replacing Lori Sporrer. She has been with Hamilton Relay for about eight years. She is working closely with Lori Sporrer as she transitions to this new position. She reported for the quarter July through September 2024 as follows:

The traditional relay service (TRS), the percentage answered in 10 seconds usually stays close to 100 percent (requirement is 85 percent within 10 seconds).

The CapTel relay service, the percentage answered in 10 seconds usually stays at 100 percent. (requirement is 85 percent in 10 seconds)

The TRS session in minutes – there has been minor fluctuations and there was a little spike in August after a plateau but the minutes stay on average. Montana is different from other states at staying steady.

The CapTel session in minutes – there has been a decline, and this is a nationwide trend due to the analog lines transitioning to digital lines.

In reference to the quality scores for TRS, the company-wide average is 99 percent. Typing words per minute averages out to 81.4 percent and the accuracy average is 99 percent, both company-wide. The expectation for the communication assistants (CAs) is 60 words per minute with a 95 percent accuracy and company-wide this expectation is being exceeded.

The quality scores for CapTel are 179.9 words per minute on average; the accuracy average is 99.64 percent, and the rate of error average is .36 percent. The expectation for the CapTel CAs are 135 words per minute with an accuracy of 98 percent and an average rate of error of 2 percent. This expectation is being surpassed.

For customer care with TRS, there was one general information call in July, one external complaint that was mistakenly dialing the wrong number, and three wrong-number hangups. In August there was another external complaint, and in September one wrong number hangup.

For customer care with CapTel – there were no contacts for the last three months.

The remote conference captioning minutes fluctuate depending on the usage for a particular month.

Emilie Banasiak reported on the outreach events she has done such as the Relay Friendly Business training in October and the event she did with Jeff Haley in Missoula and the Montana Youth Transition conference with Mike Bouchard. Ms. Banasiak is currently in the process of researching events for 2025. She asked that if the committee has any target audiences they want her to look into to let her know.

#### **Unfinished business –**

- **MTAP administrative rules update – pertaining to the appeals process** – see attachment (Answering MTAP’s Questions ARM Appeal Process.pdf) titled “DPHHS Legal Response to MTAP Questions Concerning Current Appeal Process” The committee discussed the issues of the meeting being public vs private, having a quorum or a three-person panel, or just send it to a fair hearing office. Concerns about HIPAA violations were mentioned especially for people with disabilities. A consultation with an attorney will be done regarding having an open meeting and it becoming closed if it’s HIPAA-sensitive information and whether either a three-person panel or a quorum can be closed.
- **Request for MTAP to create Right to Refuse policy for Remote Conference Captioning services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons** – this was mentioned earlier in Mary Taylor’s report.
- **Follow up to August Public Comment**
  - **Request for MTAP to ensure effective communications for Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons during virtual court proceedings through funding for court reporters and/or MTAP support of legislative bill** – there is no further information or further requests concerning follow up from the August public comment discussion at this time.

#### **New business –**

- **May meeting location** – The committee decided to hold the May meeting, including an outreach event the day prior, in Lewistown.

**The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.**