

Montana Telecommunications Access Program
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
August 18, 2022
Helena, Montana

Committee Members Present: Tina Shorten, vice chair; Lisa Cannon (via Zoom), Lee Hazelbaker, Jim Streeter, Bob Terwilliger (via Zoom), Chanda Hermanson, Sherri Odlin (via Zoom), Ron Bibler, Michelle Owens, Cam Tulloch, John Pavao (via Zoom)

Committee Members Absent: Barb Varnum, Tom Thompson

MTAP Staff Present: Mary Taylor, Lisa Gault, Mike Bouchard, Jeff Haley

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Shannon Mackey, budget analyst; Asia Johnson (via Zoom), Hamilton Relay; Shawn Tulloch, deaf services manager (via Zoom), Stella Woodrum and Trisha Smith, sign language interpreters; Cheri Reed-Anderson and Jeanne Stone, Vocational Rehabilitation

Meeting called to order:

Tina Shorten called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Michelle Owens made a motion to approve the minutes and Ron Bibler seconded the motion. No discussion and the motion passed.

Public Comment:

MTAP Director's report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor opened with an update on the committee members up for renewal, Ron Bibler, Lee Hazelbaker, Chanda Hermanson, John Pavao and Tom Thompson. She has been in contact with the Governor's office, and they have received the paperwork and are still processing that paperwork. The members up for renewal should be getting letters of notification soon. Ms. Hermanson has chosen to give up her seat, and sent a notification out, inviting others interested within the department to apply. There are a couple applications submitted to the Governor's office for that position.

Ms. Taylor directed attention to the New Applications Report, noting that there was an increase in new applications last year, in comparison to the last few years, about an 11% increase. There have been some advertising campaigns during the summer with the newspapers across the state, some general information ads and some focusing on the Relay Friendly Business training, to encourage businesses to sign up, including some radio advertising. Businesses who participated in Relay Friendly Business training back in February got certified as relay-friendly, including the following: Top Gun Auto Body in Helena, Gallatin City-County Health department in Bozeman, Carbon County Public Health in Red Lodge and Montana Independent Living Project (name changed to Ability Montana) in Helena. In addition, MTAP will be doing some special TV advertising during the fall, during the Bobcat and Grizzly games.

There has been an update on the scheduling request form for remote conference captioning. The deadline has been extended for some of the meetings such as a ten-day cancellation notice for Spanish relay and five days for meetings that goes more than four hours or has multiple sessions. Before it was one full business day but there is a shortage of captionists for these types of meetings and if a meeting gets canceled too late, late fees will be charged and that can become costly. Ms. Taylor is working on updating the MTAP website and Hamilton Relay will be updating the Remote Conference Captioning scheduling request form to reflect these changes.

Contracts for purchasing equipment from Teltex, Facebook advertising with Devaney & Associates and the database management with Sockeye have all been renewed for another year. The contract with Hamilton Relay will be coming up for renewal in February of 2023.

Ms. Taylor has been working on some Administrative Rule changes – items were identified that need to be updated, most importantly the appeals procedures for MTAP. She has been working with the legal department on updating the Conditions of Acceptance (COA) document that MTAP uses for loaning equipment to the clients. The document will be updated to make sure that the client understands that for smart devices, such as iOS devices, they will need to provide the passwords or codes set on the device or take the code off the device before returning it to MTAP. Another change will be in giving out equipment to people who are not eligible. Previously out of warranty phones were given out to non-eligible clients along with an assessment. The DPHHS legal department warned this could be a liability to the program. This process has ceased for now with the out of warranty phones but, the equipment technicians can still do an assessment and the program provides the non-eligible clients catalogs for ordering their own equipment.

The Facebook report shows that the average impressions have increased over the last quarter (the number of times that the ad was viewed). Ms. Taylor noted on the Website Analytics Report that the bounce rate (when a person comes onto the website and leaves immediately after) has gone up, which means people are not staying as long on the website to look at other things. Resources are continuing to be added to the website such as the 211 resource which connects a person with all the different resources there are in the DPHHS and around the state.

Ms. Taylor has submitted the annual FCC complaint report in June and is waiting on notification from the FCC to complete the paperwork for recertification of the Montana Telecommunications Access Program (that occurs every five years). She mentioned that she is in contact with the MSHA (Montana Speech and Hearing Association) to see if Atos Medical (who specializes in the electrolarynxes provided by MTAP) can do a presentation at the MSHA conference in October.

The MTAP staff participated in some trainings, most notably the electrolarynx training provided by Atos Medical. In addition, Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley attended the TEDPA conference in July. Ms. Taylor mentioned that the next NASRA and TEDPA conferences are scheduled to take place in Kentucky next year.

Budget Report: Shannon Mackey

Shannon Mackey opened with the state fiscal year 2022 budget totals for MTAP as of June 30, 2022.

Personal services	\$252,154
Operations	\$627,677

FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u><u>\$1,654,831</u></u>

Actual expenses through June 30, 2022

MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (90.78% of the \$879,311)	\$798,678
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$87,307
Prior year expense	\$209
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$886,194</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through June 30, 2022

Personal services (94.36% of \$279,800 PS projected budget)	\$264,018
Operational expenses (89.11% of \$600,031 OE projected budget)	<u>\$534,660</u>
Total expenses (90.78% of \$879,831 total HB2 budget)	\$798,678

Revenue collected as of June 30, 2022, \$1,519,276

SFY 2023 appropriated budget - \$1,662,265

Personal services	\$259,398
Operations -	\$627,867
FCC Mandate -	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total Budget -	\$1,662,265

SFY 2023 actual expenses through July 31, 2022

HB2 budget appropriation (1.98% of the \$877,265)	\$17,558
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	-0-
Prior year expense	-0-
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$17,558</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through July 31, 2022

Personal services (5.14% of \$259,398 PS projected budget)	\$13,344
Operational expenses (0.82% of \$627,677 OE projected budget)	<u>\$4,214</u>
Total expenses (1.98% of \$887,265 total HB2 budget)	\$17,558

Operating Expenses through July 31, 2022 - SFY 2023 \$4,214

Rent/Utilities – total expenditures \$3,505, (total rent budget \$42,500, remaining \$38,995)
Other Expenses/equipment – total expenditures \$225 (total equipment budget \$10,000, remaining \$9,775)
Communications – total expenditures \$469 (total communication budget, \$6,000, remaining \$5,531)
Other services – total expenditures \$15 (total other services budget \$35,000, remaining \$34,985)

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Projected costs for SFY2023 indirect costs are \$85,000
- No indirect or prior year expenses as of July 31, 2022

FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time

Discussion ensued on the 2023 budget. Questions were posed regarding the revenue and what to do with it and indirect costs being increased. Chanda Hermanson explained that the revenue cannot be touched, only the amount that has been appropriated. Only the legislature can give the authority to spend more than the appropriated amount. Tina Shorten asked for a motion to approve the fiscal year 2023 budget as presented. Ron Bibler made the motion and Lee Hazelbaker seconded the motion. Motion carried.

DPHHS Report – Chanda Hermanson

Chanda Hermanson reported that the new director of Public Health and Human Services, Charlie Brereton, has started recently and is replacing Adam Meier. Preparation is underway for the upcoming legislative session in January. The process involves a formal executive planning process (EPP) where the public, programs and such submit ideas to the Governor's office on what kind of policy changes they want the Governor's office to make and put forth as bills. For the budget side, ideas are put forth of what people want to see built into House Bill 2. House Bill 2 is the bill that is the government's budget, the entire state of Montana. If one wants to submit ideas, they can go on a particular website to submit ideas to the Governor's office. They go to the executive director, Erica Johnston who screens the ideas and passes them along. Ms. Hermanson also reminded the committee that the legislators also write their own bills and make amendments to House Bill 2 so it's not just through the Governor's office, people can talk to their local elected officials about this. She also mentioned that the general fund and special revenue fund are two separate things.

Ms. Hermanson explained the history of the MTAP revenue building up and reserving some money in case the federal government decides to hand over responsibilities of paying the relay minutes to the states, and the state legislators seeing the buildup of revenue and deciding to take money out of MTAP and using it for other programs. She said that there is a proposal to have more appropriations to access that cash and use it as intended, for people with speech and hearing difficulties. The legislative session is usually done by April or May.

The collaborative safety training has been ongoing for different departments within the DPHHS. Ms. Hermanson explained that collaborative safety is a way to manage operations and personnel in a safer way by encouraging people to slow down and find out what happened instead of placing blame quickly.

Ms. Hermanson informed the committee that there are some recession issues with the workforce and it's impacting state government and she is hopeful that with the school year starting again, that there will be more applicants. The waiting list for vocational rehabilitation services has been reduced with the opening of category

two which includes people with significant disabilities. Category three remains closed. A technology grant for the state is going to MonTECH at the University of Montana. A letter was written to the director of Health and Human Services in D.C. requesting the University of Montana be made the lead agency for that grant and permission was granted. Now the process is beginning with MonTECH to do the paperwork and figure out what to do to get that implemented.

There is a deficit in the state on benefits counseling for work incentive planning for people with disabilities. There are federal grants that serves all SSI and SSDI beneficiaries that want to work. The two people that do this are at capacity. It is an important service to help manage the clients' benefits and wages as it affects housing and SNAP benefits. Ms. Hermanson said because the capacity to provide those services are so low, they are looking at contracting with the Montana State University Billings Center for Improved Education on funding some of those because what the federal grants are providing is not serving people properly.

Ms. Hermanson added that telework is not allowed in the state offices but there was a survey done to get people's feedback about telework. She will be getting more guidance on what positions will have the ability to telework soon.

Hamilton Relay Report: Asia Johnson

Asia Johnson reported that the waiver that the FCC put out initially at the onset of the pandemic has expired. For answer performance with the traditional relay service, the standard is 85 percent of all calls answered within ten seconds or less. For Montana, it has remained consistent between 95 and 100. For CapTel calls, it is the same, standard 85% of all calls answered within 10 seconds, and the calls are consistently between 95 and 100 percent.

For session and conversation minutes related to traditional relay, the data is pretty consistent and for CapTel session and conversation minutes, it has continued to decline. Quality scores company-wide was 97 percent and the communication assistants are typing 97.3 words per minute on average with a typing accuracy of 98 percent. Remote conference captioning is not consistent, depends on the month and Ms. Taylor and Hamilton Relay are continuing to monitor for misuse of this service.

In June, Emilie Banasiak and John Fechter attended the Family Learning Weekend at MSDB along with John's daughter as part of the outreach events planned for the year. There will be more webinars scheduled for the Relay Friendly Business training as well as a statewide 911 training.

MTAP Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley

Jeff Haley opened with outreach events he has attended such as the Family Learning Weekend at MSDB, a Missoula Paddleheads baseball game as well as the TEDPA conference. He felt he learned a lot from the TEDPA conference, especially listening to other states' representatives discussing how they operate their programs and get funding. He mentioned one state that stood out to him, North Carolina, that they also provide hearing aids. He will be attending the 2022 Governor's Conference on Aging in October and is staying busy serving clients across his region.

Mike Bouchard added that for his part in the TEDPA conference, he was on a panel discussing analog to digital conversion. The discussion was related to seeing how some of the older CapTel models are not working effectively on digital lines now. Options are being worked on so people will not need to have internet access to have captions working. This will be mainly served by the Google Speech engine being loaded directly onto a tablet or something similar where they don't need the Internet connection to get the Cloud speech engine. Mr. Bouchard's biggest take away from the TEDPA conference is that there is a push to have Internet access for all. He understands that it might be a lower bandwidth because the federal level and state level will have to figure out funding for this. For outreach, he will have a table at a Vet Resource Fair in Billings and at a Mustangs baseball game. He is also shooting a commercial for MTAP with ABC Fox.

Unfinished business

No unfinished business.

New business

Approve FY2023 budget – this was done earlier in the meeting.

Tina Shorten said that the strategic planning committee will come up with a plan and also plan for the Deaf, Deaf World training. Michelle Owens added a suggestion for the strategic planning committee to consider partnering with carriers such as Blackfoot.

Next meeting is in Helena on November 17, 2022.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 p.m.