

Montana Telecommunications Access Program
Minutes: Full Committee Meeting
August 15, 2024
2401 Colonial Drive, Wilderness Room
Helena, Montana

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

Committee Members Absent: Michelle Owens

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

Supporting and Contributing Persons Present: Sarah Seltzer, deputy administrator; Emilie Banasiak and Lori Sporrer, Hamilton Relay (via Zoom); Hannah Stokes, budget analyst (via Zoom); Shawn Tulloch, VR counselor (via Zoom); Molly Verseput and Macy Henze, sign language interpreters; Lisa Lesofski

Meeting called to order:

Lisa Cannon called the meeting to order.

Approval of Minutes:

Barbara Varnum moved to approve the May 2024 minutes and Tina Shorten seconded. Motion carried.

MTAP Director's report: Mary Taylor

Mary Taylor opened with the renewal of terms for Dana Kjersem, Michelle Owens, and Tina Shorten. She noted that the Governor's Office has renewed their terms through July 1, 2027. Sheri Odlin has chosen not to apply for another term on the committee and Ms. Taylor has made some contacts to find a replacement for the position of public safety answering point (PSAP/911 call center).

Regarding new applications coming into the office, this past fiscal year (FY2024) there has been 150 applications. There is a bit of a decline in the number of applications in comparison to past years. Ms. Taylor is focusing on campaigning/advertising and outreach to ensure people are aware of the program. She is aware that people are abandoning their analog phone lines (landlines) as the office has received applications from people who no longer have a landline. MTAP does offer the Jitterbug for anyone that might not qualify for an iPhone or Android. Ms. Taylor added that she was in contact with the I.T. department at the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) and has been given some used iPhone 11's that were employee phones. MTAP hopes to utilize those "as is" phones as back up in the of case of a client who may not qualify for an iPhone based on their disability, but has expressed interest in one.

During the summer, MTAP did some extra outreach, including an interview Mary Taylor and Mike Bouchard did with Aging Horizons, a TV show that airs statewide on Sundays, and can also be viewed on the YouTube platform. They shared information about MTAP, including the services and equipment offered through the

program. Ms. Taylor ran some advertising during the summer Olympics and some advertising on Facebook connected to the Relay Friendly Business training that occurred in June 2024. For the upcoming fall season, advertising will run during the Montana State University (Bobcats) and University of Montana (Grizzly) games. She is working on setting up advertising at the movie theaters and checking into advertising on TV screens by the checkout aisles in grocery stores. There has been discussion among the staff about bringing their laptop to outreach events to encourage people to sign up for the program onsite as some people may pick up the applications at the event and do not follow through with filling out an application later.

Outreach during the summer has been busy for the MTAP staff with attendance at the Family Learning Weekend event at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB), online Relay Friendly Business training, with Mr. Bouchard at a table at the Billings Mustangs baseball game and Jeff Haley hosting a table at a few Out to Lunch events in Missoula. In addition, Lisa Gault did a table at the Farmers' Market with MSDB. During the fall, MTAP staff will attend the Governor's Conference on Aging, the Montana Health Care Association conference and the Montana Youth Transitions Conference. MTAP staff will join with the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) at an event in Poplar at the Fort Peck Community College to share information about different organizations the end of September and there will be another Relay Friendly Business training in October.

Regarding the Relay Friendly Business (RFB) training, Ms. Taylor mentioned that MTAP and Hamilton Relay have held six trainings in total. There are a total of 15 organizations that have been certified. She is concerned that at times there are a high number of people signing up but fewer show up for the training and wants to make sure there is no technical reason for people not joining after signing up. She will reach out to those who signed up for the June RFB training and did not attend to let them know there will be another training in October and encourage them to let us know if they experienced any technical difficulties in June that prevented them from attending.

The Facebook report consists of regular posts and paid advertising posts and this past quarter the top unpaid (not boosted) post was about Celebrating Montana Day. The top performing paid (boosted) advertisement was the Focus on a Relay Friendly Business post. Every month MTAP picks a Relay Friendly Business to promote, and we ask them four questions about the training they participated in and post that with their picture.

The MTAP website showed a decline in the bounce rate this past quarter. That means people came into the website and stayed a while looking at the website more. Over one thousand people that visited the website came from seeing the Facebook page out of almost five thousand visitors. The Facebook page is helping to draw people to the website.

Ms. Taylor is working on renewing contracts for Teltex, Sockeye, and Facebook that expired in June 2024. Teltex is for the phone equipment and Sockeye is for the database management. Both of those have been renewed through June of 2025. The Facebook contract is still pending. Ms. Taylor cited a few hold ups that this contract was caught up in, including such things as new staff, new forms, and new rules causing the delay. She hopes to have this contract completed soon.

There are two changes in the works with the Administrative Rules of Montana. There will be the income guidelines change for the year 2023 and the name change of the program. There will be a public hearing for both changes on August 19th, and Ms. Taylor does not anticipate any public comment on those two changes. For the changes that Tina Shorten, Lisa Cannon, and Ms. Taylor have made for policies for the whole program,

including the definition of income, these changes will likely not go into effect until after the blackout period when the legislative session concludes. The committee will have the opportunity to discuss the proposed changes later in the meeting.

Ms. Taylor submitted the FCC complaint report on June 21st, covering the period from June 1st to May 31st every year. She noted that his year no complaints were reported.

The National Association of State Relay Administrators (NASRA) and Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA) conferences are coming up in early September. Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley will attend the TEDPA conference while Lisa Cannon, Dana Kjersem and Ms. Taylor will attend the NASRA conference.

Budget Report: Hannah Stokes

Hannah Stokes reported on the state fiscal year 2024 budget totals for MTAP as of June 30, 2024.

Personal services	\$329,890
Operations	\$597,815
FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u><u>\$1,702,705</u></u>

Actual expenses through June 30, 2024

MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (91.86% of the \$927,705)	\$852,153
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$97,803
Prior year expense	(\$217)
Total expenses for program	<u><u>\$949,956</u></u>

House Bill 2 expenditures through June 30, 2024

Personal services (90.43% of \$329,890 PS projected budget)	\$298,306
Operational expenses (92.65% of \$597,815 OP projected budget)	<u>\$553,847</u>
Total expenses (91.85% of \$927,705 total HB2 budget)	\$852,153

Revenue collected as of June 30, 2024 - \$1,607,424

SFY 2024 actual expenses through June 30, 2024

Operating Expenses through June 30, 2024 - SFY 2024 - \$553,847

- Hamilton Relay Services – total expenditures \$186,151
- Outreach – total expenditures \$176,326

- Rent/Utilities – total expenditures \$43,023
- Travel – total expenditures \$15,145
- Supplies – total expenditures \$4,027
- Distribution Equipment – total expenditures \$65,627
- Other Expenses/Equipment – total expenditures \$9,943
- Communications – total expenditures \$7,693
- Repairs/maintenance (vehicles) – total expenditures \$8,993
- Other services – total expenditures \$36,919

Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Actual costs for SFY 2024 indirect costs are \$97,803

FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time.

DPHHS report –Sarah Seltzer

Sarah began with some DPHHS updates such as the executive planning process (EPP) for the 2025 legislative session and a request for more appropriations for MTAP has been submitted and accepted by the Governor's office. There has been a Human Services Executive Director, Jessie Counts, hired for the Economic Securities Branch which is part of the division that MTAP is within, under the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

October is Disability Awareness Month and there will be a Disability Mentoring week. The Department is working on matching up mentors with students who have disabilities.

Ms. Seltzer mentioned that they have a public relations specialist who has started. This is a new position for DET. Her name is Nicole Loney, and she is in the infancy stages of developing a social media and marketing plan division-wide and trying to figure out how that looks for MTAP, vocational rehabilitation, probably less so for disability determination services, but all the pieces of the Disability Employment and Transitions Division.

MTAP Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley

Mike Bouchard discussed some outreach that he had done such as hosting a table with Siyeh Communications for their Customer Appreciation event in Browning. It was their first time doing this event and Mr. Bouchard said he would like to go again next year and hopefully some of the difficulties at this event will be improved for next year. He also conducted a training with the Montana Law Enforcement Academy the previous month. This training is done four times a year alternating with Mr. Bouchard and Jeff Haley. Mr. Bouchard will be doing some events in the fall such as the Montana Health Care Association conference and the Governor's Conference on Aging.

There was some discussion relating to the use of CapTel phones vs Caption Call phones with a hotspot. Jeff Haley expanded on this by adding that they have used an X-Link connection which is basically a Bluetooth connection enabling a cell phone to have a landline connection without a landline phone. On a recent visit with a client, attempting to connect a CapTel phone without a landline and using a X-Link, Mr. Haley discovered by

talking to the CapTel customer service people, that the CapTel company can assign VoIP phone lines to their clients at no charge. The client had good Internet service, just no landline so the CapTel company was able to assign him a phone number. The CapTel customer service person did say that this is not common knowledge, they only do this when needed.

Hamilton Relay Report – Lori Sporrer and Emilie Banasiak

Lori Sporrer will focus on the most recent quarter which covers April, May, and June of this year. Regarding the traditional relay service (TRS) the percentage of calls answered within ten seconds, for April it was 99 percent, May was 99 percent and June was 98 percent. For the captioned phone, the percentage of calls answered has stayed at 100 percent. Regarding the TRS, the conversation minutes (which covers TTY, voice carryover, hearing carryover, and speech-to-speech services) are holding steady and has increased a little bit compared to last year. She noted that last year was 867 conversation minutes and this year it is 1,054 conversation minutes for this quarter. Session minutes begin from the time the call starts to the time the communication assistant hangs up and for traditional relay service for the current quarter, the total session minutes totaled 2,003 and last year it was 1,931.

The conversation and session minutes for the captioned phones (non-Internet) has been on a decline and in comparing last year to this current quarter, the minutes have declined by half of what it was a year ago. This quarter saw a total of 196 session minutes.

Quality scores for the TRS remain good as the requirement for typing words per minute needs to be at least 60 and it is an average of 73. The accuracy of words typed needs to be at least 95 and it is 98 percent. The quality scores for the captioned phone remain good and the requirement for typing words per minute is higher than for the TRS because of technology and it needs to be at least 130 words per minute and for Montana it is averaging 171. The accuracy of words typed needs to be at least 97 percent and it's averaging out to be 99.5 percent.

Customer care contacts – there have been seven inquiries for traditional relay service and none for the captioned phone. The Remote Conference Captioning (RCC) minutes varies month by month depending on who utilizes the service in Montana.

Emilie Banasiak reported on the outreach that has been done such as the Family Learning Weekend in Great Falls and the Relay Friendly Business webinar the end of June. She will do the next Relay Friendly Business webinar in October and attend the Health and Wellness Fair in Missoula, and the Montana Youth Transitions conference in Great Falls in November.

Unfinished business – MTAP administrative rules update (separate attachment), ASL Now

Mary Taylor explained the general concept of ASL Now and asked the committee if they wanted to see a demonstration of this at the next meeting and they agreed to go ahead and schedule a demonstration.

New business – Approve FY 2025 Budget, Follow up on May public comment

Barbara Varnum proposed to approve the FY 2025 budget and Lee Hazelbaker seconded the motion. Motion was carried.

The Committee followed up on Faith Dawson's request that was made during the May meeting's public comment. Faith had expressed that there needs to be effective communication options especially during virtual court proceedings and asked if MTAP could support funding for court reporters possibly through a new legislation, or proposed legislation. Currently there is no proposed legislation and Ms. Dawson said she has been coordinating with some people within the state of Montana and looking at best practices for what other states have done in terms of funding accommodations across all the departments. Once she and the others come up with something specific in terms of a proposed bill, she will bring that back to the committee. Ms. Taylor asked Ms. Dawson what she is seeking from MTAP in terms of support and Ms. Dawson replied that she would like the committee's feedback on the best practices model and if the proposal is approved by the MTAP committee, she would appreciate a letter of support or to have people come testify during legislation.

Another request that Ms. Dawson made is to create a policy that gives a person the right to refuse Remote Conference Captioning services for deaf and hard of hearing persons in respect to being told that this accommodation is the one decided by another entity that the person with a hearing challenge will be able to utilize. This would ensure the person could refuse the accommodation if they feel it is not effective for them.

Ms. Taylor discussed this with the DPHHS legal person to see what wording could be incorporated into the Remote Conference Captioning scheduling request form and came up with some wording that was approved by the attorney. This wording states that, "I understand that remote conference captioning transcripts are not intended to be an official transcript for court proceedings and may not be considered admissible in a court of law." Consideration was given to making that a check box if someone was requesting captioning and wanted a transcript. There could be a drop-down box, and the requester would click that they understand that the transcript may not be permissible in a court of law. Ms. Taylor added that there was another statement they were considering but she has not consulted with the attorney yet, the statement being the following, "I further understand that if I decline to use the services offered, it will be my responsibility to make alternative arrangements." Discussion ensued about whether this will help and raise awareness of how to use the remote conference captioning and whether Hamilton Relay would be willing to add this on the RCC scheduling request form.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:41 p.m.