

**Montana Telecommunications Access Program**  
**Minutes: Full Committee Meeting**  
**November 15, 2018**  
**Wilderness Room, Colonial - Helena**

**Committee Members Present:** Drew Arnot, chair, Ron Bibler, vice chair, Tina Shorten, Jay Preston, Lisa Cannon, Cam Tulloch

**Committee Members Absent:** John Pavao, Tom Thompson, Chanda Hermanson-Dudley

**MTAP Staff Present:** Mary Taylor, Steve Johnson, Lisa Gault, Richard Ballou

**Supporting and Contributing Persons Present:** Emilie Banasiak and Connie Phelps, Hamilton Relay, Trisha Smith and Crystal Kramer, sign language interpreters, Sheri Vukasin, financial manager/budget analyst, Shawn Tulloch, program manager - deaf services for DET

**Meeting called to order:**

Drew Arnot called the meeting to order. Discussion ensued over the ability to use proxies. Sheri Vukasin served as the acting proxy for the department, in Chanda Hermanson-Dudley's absence. Ron suggested that Committee members who are planning to be absent assign a proxy to sit in for them, to ensure there is a quorum at each meeting.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Ron Bibler moved to approve the minutes as presented and Lisa Cannon seconded. Tina Shorten abstained from voting since she was absent at the previous meeting. Vote was unanimous in accepting the minutes from the August meeting.

**Public Comment:**

No public comment.

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

Mary Taylor opened with the four vacancies on the committee and she stated that she spoke with Stacey Otterstrom from the Governor's office about this situation. Ms. Otterstrom mentioned she had a potential candidate for the vacant nondisabled business other than telecommunications seat. Ms. Otterstrom also welcomed suggestions for the position Julia Saylor vacated and for the largest service provider. Regarding the largest service provider, Ms. Taylor followed up with Nick Domitrovich on the bill he was working on that included the change from the largest service provider to a wireless carrier. Mr. Domitrovich is working on getting a couple people to carry that change and will inform Ms. Taylor of any updates. Another vacancy is Marilyn Daumiller's position. Ms. Taylor mentioned she does know of someone who has shown an interest in that position, but Ms. Otterstrom indicated that she may need something in writing concerning Ms. Daumiller's resignation.

Discussion ensued about the largest service provider switching to a wireless carrier and the intent of the statute, which was to make sure that the big providers come through to the fund as they are the largest contributor to the fund. Ideas were discussed as to which providers in the state would be a good contact to invite to the committee. After further discussion and some suggestions brought to the table, Ron Bibler made a motion that the committee support the replacement of the largest service provider to someone who represents public safety and have the statute modified to reflect this change. Jay Preston seconded this motion. Discussion ensued and Ms. Shorten questioned if there will be enough telecom representation on the committee, i.e. Jay Preston represents an InterLATA carrier so that position is always going to be a phone company representative and Drew Arnot represents an ILEC so that will be present as well. Mr. Preston mentioned that the purpose would be to have an entity that is collecting most of the fees that support this program having some voice in any advisory capacity. Mr. Bibler makes the point that even if the statute is rewritten so it could be any telecom, the difficulty in recruiting someone for the committee will be the same so he feels it is time to add a public safety person to the committee or make that possibility available. All voted in favor of having Nick Domitrovich put a bill together striking the largest carrier and including someone from public safety.

Ms. Taylor mentioned that she got an updated handbook for the committee which she has emailed to all the committee members and she also reported on the NASRA/TEDPA conferences that she attended. One of the bigger topics at the conferences was a nationwide trend of sorts in declining volume and the migration to Internet and clients needing accessories and devices that go with the telephone. There was also discussion about real time text and there will be a demo by Hamilton Relay on this at the next meeting. There also is a bigger focus on the Next Generation 911 and making sure that people can access the 911 through texting or different means. Ms. Taylor stated that next year's conference will be held in Phoenix.

Contracts are coming due, such as the contract with Hamilton Relay which will expire on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, with options to renew. The contract with Teltex for equipment ends May 26<sup>th</sup> and has renewal options. Ms. Taylor is also working on contracts with Devaney & Associates, one for management and creation of an MTAP Facebook page and another for Facebook advertising. In addition to working on the contracts, Ms. Taylor has been working on filling Steve Johnson's position since he is retiring on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Approval has been given to move the office from Great Falls to Billings. Interviews have been conducted and hopefully the person will be hired prior to Steve Johnson leaving.

Future outreach events were discussed with Emilie Banasiak the day prior to this meeting, and focus will be on how to increase the number of applications coming in to MTAP. Ms. Taylor will look over the plans for the coming year's advertising, where they should be and what type will be done. Ms. Taylor also added that she and Ricky Ballou visited one of the Hamilton Relay call centers in Maryland and they got to see demonstrations of all the various call types, learn about training programs that they provide, and discuss customer care, disaster preparedness and remote conference captions.

Future meeting dates were given, and Ron Bibler made a motion to have the spring meeting in Billings on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and the day before have the technology fair. Cam Tulloch seconded. All voted in favor of this motion.

## **Budget Report: Sheri Vukasin**

Sheri Vukasin opened with a comment that the budget hasn't changed much. The appropriation total is slightly less than last time she gave the budget update due to a reduction that is done for termination payouts when people leave the state of Montana. It's just a reduction in appropriation authority and it happens every year and does not affect the cash or fund balance. The program has expended about 30 percent of the appropriation 1/3 of the way through the current fiscal year. Ms. Vukasin does not see anything major happening between the projections for operational costs, personal costs, etc. MTAP has collected \$639,000 in revenue between July 1<sup>st</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup>. Projection is to get about \$1.38 million in collections for the year, so this is about halfway there. The beginning fund balance at the start of the state fiscal year was \$3.7 million. Ms. Vukasin mentioned that collections wax and wane throughout the year because some of the telecommunications companies report on a quarterly basis, monthly basis or a biannual basis. Discussion ensued about the 10-cent fee per phone as well as the probability of the FCC transferring responsibility to the states. Also, discussion arose over whether accessories were covered, and a request was to have Ms. Taylor follow up with Nick Domitrovich to get legal interpretation/clarification and she also mentioned it is in the Montana Codes Annotated.

### **Disability Advisory Committee Report – Ron Bibler**

Ron Bibler shared that the general issue that was discussed was the question of who is going to pay for what on relay going forward. The comment and reply period are done and the FCC request for information has been concluded. Mr. Bibler sees the FCC coming out and making equipment distribution a mandatory state program because the elderly population is growing, more military veterans are coming back with hearing losses and phones with just a phone jack, the state pays for the minutes (intrastate) and the phones with an Internet connection, 100 percent of those are paid by the federal fund. The FCC has jurisdiction over the Internet. More people are disconnecting from landlines as well. Mr. Bibler does not feel that the FCC will be handing over the responsibility to the states as none of the comments from the responders supported this.

### **FCC update – Drew Arnot**

Drew Arnot shared information from an article he received last month regarding the FCC's plan to reduce its reimbursement for hearing impaired phone services, indicating that it could adopt a change in its reimbursement formula within 12 months. He noted that annual minutes consumers spend on captioned phone services have skyrocketed from 29 million in 2011 to 363 million in 2017 according to the FCC and those are minutes the federal government is covering. Mr. Bibler added that the FCC did offer to reduce the rate to \$1.75 a minute and the advisory council he is on made a recommendation to the fund administrator to go with the MARS rate, and the MARS rate is basically looking at all the other state contracts out there and putting together a competitive bid. The FCC cut it down to \$1.75 as of June this year. The council Mr. Bibler is on got to look at the books of the five largest providers. He got to look at Sprint's books and Hamilton's books and see what the true cost of a minute was. A recommendation was made that the \$1.75 will receive another 10 percent drop. If that does happen, providers might drop out because they would lose money.

### **Hamilton Relay Report: Emilie Banasiak and Connie Phelps**

Connie Phelps mentioned two things, that Hamilton Relay will do a demonstration of real time text at the next meeting and Hamilton Innovations (one of the branches at Hamilton) has created an RTT phone and that was demonstrated at the NASRA/TEDPA conference.

Connie Phelps opened with the call traffic report as follows:

For traditional relay services -- from July 2018 to September 2018 which includes TTY calls, voice carryover calls, hearing carryover calls and speech to speech.

- 98 to 100% of calls were answered within 10 seconds.
- Intrastate calls (within Montana – that MTAP pays for) – session minutes ranged from 1,750 to 2,000 and conversation minutes ranged from 1,000 to 1,250.
- TRS quality scores – a third independent company assesses the quality as well as Hamilton Relay. It is anywhere from 92% to 100% at the relay centers that Montana calls can hit, which include Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Nebraska. Ms. Phelps expanded to explain what factors are considered for quality such as missed words, misspelled words, gaps and this report is sent every quarter but tracks every month.
- Typing words per minute, the requirement is 60 words per minute and the range is anywhere from 69.3 wpm to 84.6 wpm. Typing accuracy is ranging from 97 to 99 percent.

For CapTel – from July 2018 to September 2018

- 100% of calls were answered within 10 seconds.
- Intrastate calls – session minutes ranged from 4,500 to 5,000 and conversation minutes ranged about 4,000.
- CapTel quality scores - Average words per minute was 174.17, rate of accuracy was 99.72%.

For Montana Relay Conference Captioning minutes there was a big jump in August 2018.

Ms. Taylor inquired as to what is considered a customer complaint versus needing additional help. Ms. Phelps based it on several areas, whether it be service questions, technical questions, issues with the product itself, billing, set up, information/education or other.

Emilie Banasiak reported on outreach for the past quarter such as attending the Montanan Health Care Association Convention in Billings and the Veterans Stand Down in Libby. Another event was the Montana Association of Public Safety Communication Officials conference in Bozeman. They wanted to do a booth there because the 911 centers interact with the relay services and since technology is changing and the advent of text to 911 with more counties participating, they felt this was a good outreach opportunity.

Ms. Banasiak will have a list of upcoming events at the next meeting and she also added that the scholarship program is open for high school students who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing or have difficulty speaking. She will email the application and deadline for everyone to see. The Hamilton Relay Deaf Community Leader award will be given to Tyler Hanson who is the vice president of Montana Association of the Deaf and is heavily involved in other organizations as well.

Regarding the 911 calls, Ms. Banasiak added that the CapTel for computer, smartphones and tablets handle 911 calls differently, since these items are mobile, so it's important to let the 911 operator know where you are especially if you are traveling and your phone may be registered to you, i.e. Ms. Banasiak lives in Boise so that would show up and she would have to let the operator know she's actually in Helena and to transfer to the 911 dispatch center in Helena and not in Boise. She wanted to emphasize that it's important to give your name, telephone number and physical location.

### **MTAP Equipment Report – Steve Johnson and Richard “Ricky” Ballou**

Ricky Ballou reported that in October, Mary Taylor, Steve Johnson and he had a meeting with RAZ Mobility in Billings. They discussed the accessibility features between the iOS and Android products since RAZ Mobility distributes Androids. There is a new app that has been developed recently called Voice Access. Mr. Ballou felt this was a good area to work on for MTAP regarding serving clients with mobility issues. Voice Access works in using voice recognition software to open access to a smartphone. On the standard voice recognition software, one can do certain things but it's rather limited in navigation. Voice Access allows one to delve into everything. One can use the stock voice recognition software to access Voice Access then it will put numbers on every button that one can press on the screen and use that as corresponding numbers with each app. Steve Johnson added that the RAZ Mobility CEO went into depth on the pros and cons of the Androids versus the Apple products and seemed quite honest about it.

Mr. Johnson added also that future consideration should be given to accessories as well as applications that could be added such as for the speech disabled, that has text to speech (Proloquo2Go and LAMP). He also mentioned that there are more clients using Bluetooth, such as cochlear implant clients, so that's another thing to take in consideration for future products that MTAP distributes. Mr. Johnson also thanked the committee, staff and directors that he's worked with over the last 14 years as he is retiring in December.

### **DPHHS report: Sheri Vukasin**

Sheri Vukasin is filling in for Chanda Hermanson-Dudley as she is attending other meetings. Chanda is the acting division administrator and took over for Nick Domitrovich in mid-August. Ms. Vukasin mentioned one of the things that has been discussed over the last couple years is the potential to move the Disability Employment Transitions, Vocational Rehabilitation program and MTAP from the DPHHS over to the Department of Labor. There was some back and forth on this issue and finally about a month and a half ago, it was announced that it was being tabled. It has been decided that there's a lot more behind the scenes investigation that needs to occur and just not enough time to do this prior to the legislative session. They are in the process of preparing the Governor's budget and have it ready and published for the new legislators and everyone to review at the beginning of December. All the agencies are preparing their legislative presentations and Ms. Hermanson-Dudley, Ms. Vukasin thinks, is turning her presentation in to the department to have it edited and such by tomorrow (day after this meeting). The division is not going forward with any change packages currently. A change package is where a program goes in front of their legislative subcommittee and says that they want to either expand services or provide different services. DPHHS is the largest agency in state government and has over \$3 million in a biennial budget, so the governor's office is incredibly conservative in any type of change packages to present during the legislative session. The change package that is being looked at that has not been finalized is possible provider wait increases. Ms. Vukasin stated that there are no known

issues with the MTAP budget at this point. The only thing is finding someone to support the change in the language to go from the largest service provider to an emergency responder/public safety representative.

Ms. Vukasin also added that one of the things that agencies are required to do at the beginning of legislative session is to prepare a 5 percent plan. The 5 percent plan is prepared in case projected revenues are insufficient to cover the costs for the biennium and allows the legislature or the Governor to implement these reductions. This happened at the last legislative session in 2017 but this did not affect MTAP. Any communication from anyone be it legislator or anyone else requesting information must go through the director's office. A public information officer reviews everything so that everyone that needs to know is on board. That way one doesn't get different answers from different people. Such as if someone calls Ms. Taylor or Ms. Vukasin (i.e. a legislator) they would give that information to Ms. Hermanson-Dudley and not respond directly back to the legislator. The department director and the branch managers will be in front of the subcommittee and the division administrator will give the presentation. It's up to the division administrator if they want their bureau chiefs and directors to come sit in the audience.

#### **Unfinished business**

- Vacant committee positions – this was already discussed earlier in the meeting.

#### **New business**

- No new business to discuss.

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm**