

**Montana Telecommunications Access Program**  
**Minutes: Full Committee Meeting**  
**November 18, 2021**  
**Helena, Montana**

**Committee Members Present:** Barbara Varnum, chair (via Zoom); Tina Shorten, vice chair; Cam Tulloch, Jim Streeter, Lisa Cannon, Tom Thompson (via Zoom), Ron Bibler, Chanda Hermanson (via Zoom)

**Committee Members Absent:** Lee Hazelbaker, John Pavao, Jay Preston, Sherri Odlin

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

**Supporting and Contributing Persons Present:** Shannon Mackey, budget analyst; Emilie Banasiak, Asia Johnson, Hamilton Relay (via Zoom); Shawn Tulloch, deaf services manager (via Zoom), Stella Woodrum and Trisha Smith, sign language interpreters; Michelle Owens (via Zoom) and Nicole Weitzman, members of the public.

**Meeting called to order:**

Barbara Varnum called the meeting to order.

**Approval of Minutes:**

Barb Varnum asked that her request at the previous meeting for “Deaf World” training for the MTAP Committee Members in the coming year be incorporated into the August minutes. Ron Bibler also requested that his request for an equipment demonstration at today’s meeting be incorporated into the previous minutes. Cam Tulloch asked that “deaf culture” be capitalized to Deaf Culture in the previous meeting minutes. Tina Shorten made a motion to approve the August minutes as amended. Ron Bibler seconded. All were in favor.

**Public Comment:**

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

Mary Taylor began with an update on the committee and mentioned that Jay Preston decided step down from his seat on the committee. Ms. Taylor will begin the process of finding another person for Mr. Preston’s seat. Michelle Owens applied for the position vacated by Drew Arnot. We are awaiting word from the Governor’s office on her appointment. Renewal letters should be sent out soon for Tina Shorten, Jim Streeter and Sheri Odlin, whose terms were up for renewal July 1<sup>st</sup>. All have indicated their desire to serve another term on the committee.

Ms. Taylor provided an update on the COVID-19 procedures, sharing that any staff working at home were required to return to the office as of September 7<sup>th</sup> and that there is a new screening procedure for in-home visitations. Ms. Taylor explained that on the day before the scheduled visit, the staff will ask the client if there has been any sickness; then on the day of the visit will ensure that there are no changes, to ensure that both clients and staff are safe.

New applications have increased slightly since July, averaging about 20 applications a month. There have been more noneligible applicants as well. There are plans to have a new advertising campaign connected with Relay Friendly Businesses. This advertising will promote training for those who are interested in becoming a Relay Friendly Business. Another promotion that MTAP will be doing in connection with the holiday season is the Stocking Stuffers contest with the Montana Television Network. People enter the contest online and answer questions about MTAP online; a winner will be chosen, and the prize will be a gift certificate to Swiss Colony.

In follow up to the New Applications Report, and the notable number of noneligible applicants who applied, and in consideration of MTAP's funding, Ms. Varnum interjected, posing to the committee the possibility of eliminating the financial means test required as part of the qualification to receive equipment assistance through MTAP.

For outreach, the staff has done some in-person events, dropping off brochures and some virtual events as well as events geared towards veterans. MTAP is planning to have a table at the local ice hockey game (Helena Big Horns) and will continue to find other outreach opportunities.

The form for requesting Remote Conference Captioning (RCC) has been modified; more fields have been added to allow for additional monitoring and ensure no misuse of this service. Ms. Varnum expressed some concern that the added fields might deter use of RCC, and asked Ms. Taylor to keep an eye on that. The MTAP Facebook page has had a slight uptick in reaches and likes and Ms. Taylor is trying to put more personal posts on there when possible and promoting events. The MTAP website has been updated, and some links from other state agency pages to the MTAP page were broken. Those agencies were notified so that their links could be fixed.

The NASRA and TEDPA business meetings were held in September 2021 and the conferences will be held in July in Indianapolis – the first one (TEDPA) from July 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> and the second one (NASRA) will be from July 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Normally the conferences are held in September but since the previous conference was canceled the reservations were moved to July. Ms. Taylor thinks it will get moved back to September in coming years. During the recent meetings, NASRA and TEDPA joined together to discuss the use of analog CapTels that don't connect to the Internet. The use of those phones has declined around the nation due to technology and the updating of the lines to fiberoptic, causing the phones not to work correctly.

Discussion ensued about recommendations for the May meeting with suggestions for the meeting to be held in Great Falls or Havre. Mary will check into the possibility of holding the meeting offsite, considering no issues with COVID arise. For now, we will not pursue holding the event on a reservation, due to heightened COVID restrictions in those areas.

### **Budget Report: Shannon Mackey**

Shannon Mackey opened with the state fiscal year 2022 budget totals for MTAP as of October 31, 2021.

Personal services	\$252,154
Operations	\$627,677
FCC Mandate	<u>\$775,000</u>
Total budget	<u>\$1,654,831</u>

## Actual expenses through October 31, 2021

### MTAP program expenditures

HB2 budget appropriation (23.72% of the \$879,311)	\$208,701
Indirect costs (non-budgeted appropriation)	\$15,068
Prior year expense	\$210
Total expenses for program	<u>\$223,979</u>

### House Bill 2 expenditures

Personal services (26.08% of \$279,800 PS projected budget)	\$72,959
Operational expenses (22.62% of \$600,031 OE projected budget)	<u>\$135,742</u>
Total expenses (23.72% of \$879,831 total HB2 budget)	\$208,701

Operating Expenses – SFY 2022 \$135,743

Hamilton Relay Services – total actual expenditures \$49,744  
total relay budget \$250,00, remaining \$200,256

Outreach – total actual expenditures \$34,853  
total outreach budget \$129,511, remaining \$94,658

Rent/Utilities – total actual expenditures \$13,367  
total rent budget \$42,500, remaining \$29,133

Travel – total actual expenditures \$2,793  
total travel budget \$14,000, remaining 11,208

Supplies – total actual expenditures \$1,193  
total supply budget \$6,520, remaining \$5,327

Distribution equipment (including Teltex) – total actual expenditures \$26,635  
total equipment budget \$100,000, remaining \$73,365

Other expenses/equipment – total actual expenditures \$2,832  
total other expenses budget \$9,000, remaining \$6,168

Communications – total actual expenditures \$1,241  
total communications budget \$6,500, remaining \$5,259

Repairs/Maintenance (vehicles) total actual expenditures \$1,572  
total repairs/maintenance budget \$10,000, remaining \$8,428

Other services – total actual expenditures \$1,513

total other services budget \$32,000, remaining \$30,487

#### Indirect Costs and Prior Year Expenses

- Actual costs for SFY 2022 indirect costs are \$15,068
- projected costs for SFY 2022 indirect costs are \$73,000

FCC mandate – no expenses projected at this time

Revenue collected as of October 31, 2021, \$705,476

### **DPHHS Report – Chanda Hermanson**

Chanda Hermanson opened by sharing a document that was created to be followed by all DET staff, concerning the screening of clients for COVID-19. The document consists of questions such as, “Has anyone tested positive for the virus within the last 14 days or been exposed to someone who has had it in the past week?” Another question addresses whether anyone is experiencing symptoms. If the answer is affirmative for any of the questions, the client visit is rescheduled for two weeks from the original date, and a remote meeting is scheduled in the meantime, if feasible. The day of the visit, the questions are asked again and if yes to any of the questions, the visit is postponed again. This procedure was implemented on October 18<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Hermanson added that there has also been a dress code implemented in the office.

For the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), none of the programs within the division received anything, but part of the workforce portion of the act provided some creativity in meeting the state’s workforce needs, so \$2 million of that funding was distributed to augment the vocational rehabilitation program to hire ten temporary rehab technicians for two years. This will help with enabling people to get off the waiting list to get vocational rehabilitation services. The Department of Labor has approved \$10 million for employment training programs and currently there is a proposal for businesses that access those grants, if they use these funds to hire people with disabilities and train them, they can get a \$500 bonus. This proposal is not approved yet.

Ms. Hermanson has seen some planning meetings in preparation for the 2023 legislative session and she says there needs to be an exploration of ways to access the money that MTAP has, (\$775,000 FCC mandate and revenue) to ensure it goes to the community instead of being reappropriated to other programs via the legislature. Ms. Taylor and Ms. Hermanson have been working on assessing the Administrative Rules and on December 1<sup>st</sup>, recommendations and priorities will be made.

### **Hamilton Relay Report: Emilie Banasiak and Asia Johnson**

Asia Johnson opened with the traditional relay service (TRS) report. She explained that the requirement is to answer 85% of calls in 10 seconds or less. Currently, it has been averaging more than 85%. Ms. Johnson mentioned that the FCC granted a federal waiver of those requirements in March of 2020 and that has been extended several times; the current expiration is December 31 of 2021. For the CapTel phone, answer performance answered in 10 seconds or less, it has been consistently above 90%. For call volume, there has been an increase for TRS and a decrease for the CapTel phones. This decrease is related to what Ms. Taylor mentioned about the decrease in using analog CapTel phones not connected to the Internet.

Quality scores company-wide are 95% for the most recent month. The communication assistants are typing 76.4 words per minute with an accuracy of 99%. From July to September, there was an increase in TRS customer care contacts for equipment and some wrong number/hang-ups.

Remote conference captioning (RCC) call volume for the last two years has fluctuated. The request form for RCC services has been updated with the requisite that one must be a resident of the state of Montana to use the service. There is a disclaimer that MTAP still has a financial responsibility for meetings not canceled within one full business day. It's a good reminder that even if this service is free to people, it is not free for the state. The form also now includes the requestor's phone number and address. This new form was launched in mid-October. Starting in the month of November, there will be more detailed data in the report Ms. Taylor receives for the use of RCC. In response to a question from Mr. Bibler, Ms. Johnson mentioned that four states that Hamilton Relay works with offer RCC.

Emilie Banasiak has been doing outreach virtually, most recently the Governor's Conference on Aging, which used a video platform bridge called Whova. She will be doing an upcoming Relay Friendly Business webinar for businesses as well as continuing to do 911 training webinars for dispatchers.

### **MTAP Equipment Report – Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley**

Mike Bouchard and Jeff Haley demonstrated four phones that MTAP distributes to their clients, the CSC 600, the Panasonic 450, the CapTel 840i and the CapTel 2400i. The CSC and the Panasonic are amplified phones and the CapTels are captioning phones. They all have different features such as decibels (loudness), portability, built-in answering machines and touch screens, adjustable fonts, and caller ID. The CapTel 2400i can connect to the Internet either via Wi-Fi or ethernet.

**New business** – No new business – will bring information to the February meeting to decide the location for the May meeting.

**The meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m.**