



**EDUCATION and WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CABINET**  
**Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

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Executive Director

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** July 1, 2021

**TO:** Jay D. Hartz, Director  
Legislative Research Commission

**CC:** Jacqueline Coleman, Lieutenant Governor/Secretary  
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Michael J. Schmitt, Chairman  
Public Service Commission

**FROM:** Virginia L. Moore, Executive Director  
Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Virginia L. Moore".

**RE:** Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2020-2021

Per KRS 163.527, the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) Annual Report for the fiscal year (FY) 2020 - 2021 is to be submitted to the Kentucky General Assembly through the Legislative Research Commission on July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year the program is in operation.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [Virginia.moore@ky.gov](mailto:Virginia.moore@ky.gov) or at 502-573-2604.

## The Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Since its inception in 1995, the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP), administered by the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), has strived to serve the almost 700,000 deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech impaired consumers in Kentucky (17% of the population) that apply for specialized telecommunications equipment. From time to time, we receive calls, emails, cards and letters of thanks from grateful recipients. Below are some of the excerpts from FY 20-21.

"It was awesome to be able to talk to my dad this weekend!"

(Daughter of hard of hearing senior – Virgie)

"I received my iPad today. I cannot thank you guys enough! The software is wonderful! I have already used it to communicate with my grandkids. Thank you so much; this is life changing for me!"

(Speech-impaired senior – Ravenna)

"I really do appreciate getting this phone. It's very nice."

(Hard of hearing senior – Glasgow)

"I feel just like a kid at Christmas time! Thank you so much!"

(Hard of hearing senior – Independence)

"This phone will really be nice. I really appreciate you all helping me out. Thank you so much!"

(Hard of hearing senior – Auburn)

"Thank you! This is like magic!"

(Hard of hearing senior – Ft. Mitchell)

"Thank you very much for the iPad that y'all gave me and the fire alarm and all that. I sure do appreciate it. That iPad is a great joy."

(Hard of hearing senior – Madisonville)

"We thank all of you for the work you did in getting the iPhone for us. He really is enjoying it, and it helps so much with his communication."

(Wife of hard of hearing senior – Hartford)

**Telecommunications Access Program  
Annual Report  
Fiscal Year 2020-2021**

**Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
Virginia L. Moore, Executive Director**

In compliance with KRS 163.527, this annual report is submitted to the Kentucky General Assembly through the Legislative Research Commission.

“The Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shall provide to the General Assembly an annual report on the operation of the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP). The report shall be due on July 1 of each year, beginning July 1, 1995, and, at a minimum, provide:

- The number of persons served and the number of TDDs (*equipment*) distributed;
- The revenues and expenditures of the program;
- Discussion of any major policy or operational issues;
- Any changes the Commission plans to make in the program that does not require legislative action; and
- Any proposals for legislative changes in the program.”

## **The number of persons served and STE distributed:**

The Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) served **974** consumers during FY 20-21 and provided **1,063** pieces of Specialized Telecommunications Equipment (STE) to eligible applicants. In addition, KCDHH provided TAP applications in bulk to service providers who work with deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech-impaired patients/clients. These providers typically work with their clients to ensure that applications are filled out correctly and signed by an appropriate licensed professional in accordance with 735 KAR 1:010. They may also offer recommendations as to which devices will best meet their clients' needs. Many of them have taken time to become familiar with the TAP program as well as other programs and services offered by KCDHH, becoming informal partners in the agency's ongoing efforts to serve the needs of this marginalized population.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) collects funds for TAP and the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) through a small surcharge on all telecommunications access lines. The PSC distributes those funds as appropriated to KCDHH to administer the TAP and to the state contracted relay provider (Hamilton Telecommunications, Inc.) to administer TRS within the state. During FY 20-21, shipping delays created by COVID-19 required that we work closely with vendors, applying a creative approach to equipment distribution in order to ensure that consumers received the equipment they needed.

The iPhone and iPad continue to be the most popular devices, as the mobile technology meets the broadening communication needs of consumers who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired. Text messaging is the norm for most consumers with a hearing loss, and according to the 2017 *Journal on Technology and Persons with Disabilities*, 91% of the nation's disabled population utilizes wireless devices as their primary source of telecommunication. For many in this vulnerable population, these devices, which are preloaded with specialized telecommunications apps, are essential during an emergency. During the COVID-19 pandemic, necessary precautions prescribed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including "healthy at home" and social distancing, made these telecommunications devices even more important, as they provide access to vital information as well as communication. Social distancing made it harder to hear and read lips, and standard masks make lip-reading impossible, so the speech to text app can be very helpful. When activated, the app will caption any speech detected by the device's existing microphone. Apps such as FaceTime allow users to see each other, helping to overcome feelings of isolation and other issues associated with quarantining and social distancing. This and other apps providing face-to-face communication allow users to read lips and communicate using sign language as well. Amplified and captioned phones have also proved to be particularly beneficial in keeping families in contact with each other, providing access to necessary services, and reducing the sense of isolation during this difficult time, especially for seniors who live alone or in nursing homes. In addition, specialized signaling devices notify consumers of incoming calls and provide the added benefit of connecting with smoke/CO2 detectors for home safety.

Traditional outreach activities were severely curtailed in 2020, and applications for TAP equipment remained low at the end of FY 19-20. However, in FY 20-21 as offices reopened, virtual platforms gained traction and became more familiar, and the Governor continued working closely with KCDHH to ensure the access needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals were met, the KCDHH Facebook page and website received more attention. Several media outlets interviewed the Executive Director, and multiple organizations requested that she speak at various functions, where she advocated on behalf of deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind and speech-impaired Kentuckians for equal access to communication/telecommunication. The media coverage helped to overcome the lack of traditional outreach opportunities caused by COVID-19 and led to a resurgence of TAP referrals and applications.

FY 20-21 has continued to be a time of technological progress for many 911 services in the Commonwealth with the ongoing incorporation of services such as Smart911 and text to 911 in many counties, which has led to increased access for their residents. Unfortunately, lack of efficient and affordable broadband services continues to be a barrier to utilizing specialized equipment in rural areas, and we are deeply concerned for consumers' safety, as these individuals have no means of contacting emergency services outside their homes. However, the Beshear-Coleman administration's 2020 investment of CARES Act funds toward broadband expansion and the introduction of the Kentucky Broadband Initiative in January, 2021 began to turn the tide. Subsequent access mapping, the KentuckyWired Project, and the successful passage of House Bills 320 and 382, which provided significant funding for Broadband expansion, are helping to ensure that Kentucky is well on its way to making significant strides toward state-wide broadband accessibility. KCDHH continues to work with emergency management and 911 services to provide support in the form of information, education, and advocacy to improve this disparity and make services accessible to everyone, regardless of their geographical location within the Commonwealth. Such opportunities included an invitation by Lexington Emergency Management's HR team to provide a virtual presentation regarding the best ways to assist deaf and hard of hearing individuals when working to de-escalate a situation.

### **Public Relations:**

Television advertisements by Hamilton Relay, our state TRS provider, run twice a year showcasing captioned telephones. These advertisements always increase the number of applications for that device. Hamilton Relay continues to partner with us to provide state outreaches and trainings for devices utilizing the relay service. Partnership events and word of mouth from professionals and other applicants provide us with additional application requests. We reach out to professionals that serve our population on a regular basis to keep them apprised of the resources we offer to improve communication for deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired Kentuckians. The additional exposure generated through media coverage of the Governor's COVID-19 press conferences and subsequent interviews with the Executive Director helped to overcome the potential public relations deficit that COVID-19 could have created due to limited outreach opportunities.

During FY 20-21, staff members attended numerous virtual events to promote the TAP, including the following:

- Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) meetings
- Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EDHI) Advisory Board/Conference
- Governor's Office of Early Childhood (GOEC) meetings
- Hands & Voices, Kentucky chapter meetings
- Health and Medical Preparedness Advisory Committee meeting
- Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), Kentucky chapter meetings
- Humana ACCESS Resource Group presentation
- Jack Pattie Radio Talk Show appearance
- Kentucky Association of Government Communicators meeting
- Kentucky Assistive Technology Services Network Advisory Council meetings
- Kentucky Academy of Audiology "AuDacity" Conference
- Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation (KATLC) quarterly meetings
- Kentucky Emergency Management meetings
- LEAD Conference
- Mental Health Advisory Board quarterly meetings
- National Association of State Administrators for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASDHH)
- National Association of State Relay Service Administrators (NASRA) Conference
- National Hands & Voices Leadership Conference

National Public Radio (NRP interview with Samantha Morrill  
 Statewide Advisory Council for Exceptional Children meetings  
 Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA) Board meeting  
 Telecommunication Relay Services (TRS) Advisory Council meetings  
 University of Kentucky Lewis Honors College, Equality and Inclusion presentation  
 Winchester Rotary Club presentation

**Revenues and Expenditures of the Telecommunications Access Program  
 For fiscal year 2020-21**

<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>Budgeted Expenditures</b>	<b>Actual Expenditures</b>
<b>FY 2020– 21 Allotment</b>	1,378,200	1,378,200
Total Revenue collected	1,378,200	1,378,200
<b>PERSONNEL EXPENSES</b>		
State Employee Salary	224,800	168,430
State Employee Benefits	176,600	183,037
Other Personnel Services	91,100	86,853
Other	0	74,770
<b>Total Personnel Services</b>	<b>492,500</b>	<b>513,090</b>
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>		
Utilities	5,400	5,336
Other Rentals	36,000	23,839
Maintenance and Repairs	0	0
Postage Services	4,600	4,349
Miscellaneous Services	23,500	21,473
Telecommunications	8,500	8,166
Computer Services	20,500	5,667
Supplies	12,400	9,591
TAP Commodities	2,600	2,189
TAP Equipment Purchases	720,000	688,869
Travel Expense/ Allowances	15,700	2,995
Miscellaneous Commodities	36,500	34,488
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>885,700</b>	<b>806,962</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>1,378,200</b>	<b>1,320,052</b>
<b>13-33-340-TB00 BALANCE</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>58,148</b>

## Discussion of any major policy or operational issues:

As KCDHH is the only centralized, non-biased source of information regarding issues related to hearing loss, our ability to provide information, referrals, and advocacy, as well as specialized telecommunications equipment for the citizens of the Commonwealth is an essential service to the general public. TAP staff strives to provide the most technologically advanced telecommunications equipment possible to serve our constituents transitioning communication needs. The TAP is committed to improving the quality of life for the deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired citizens throughout the Commonwealth.

The annual Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA) Conference typically held in the fall and attended by the Executive Director and TAP staff was canceled in 2020 and has again been postponed until 2022 due to COVID-19. This conference provides an opportunity to gather information on new and emerging technology and will be sorely missed; however, TEDPA's web-based member's program called Basecamp and other virtual/electronic information-sharing platforms have provided alternative methods of ensuring that professionals in the field stay abreast of the latest technology.

At the beginning of FY 20-21, state government was necessarily focused on ensuring COVID-19 related vendors, such as personal protective equipment (PPE) providers, received top priority, which meant TAP Requests for Bids (RFBs) could not be processed, and as a result, vendor contracts expired. The TAP was forced to put consumers on a waiting list while KCDHH applied for emergency contract extensions. Those extensions were eventually granted, allowing equipment to be purchased and distributed to deaf, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired consumers all over Kentucky who were in desperate need of access to telecommunications services, especially at the height of the pandemic. While we continue to operate on emergency contracts, we are researching current needs in order to prepare for new RFBs.

TAP staff utilizes a host of different methods and media including vlogs, videoconferencing, video relay interpreting, FaceTime, social media, text messaging, interpreters, and email, as well as traditional telephone, USPS, and face-to-face interaction to promote the program and answer questions from consumers and professionals. TAP staff also works internally with agency PR staff to coordinate and provide outreach. In-home equipment installations were prohibited until June, 2021, due to COVID-19 safety precautions, so TAP staff worked with vendors to develop additional training videos as well as equipment-specific tutorials for the KCDHH website. TAP staff members have resumed assisting customers with installations and providing equipment demonstrations at the Frankfort office, and equipment cabinets across the state are re-opening to serve consumers in their areas.



Staff members serve on a variety of boards related to assistive technology in addition to serving on emergency notification teams to represent KCDHH in the state's efforts to bring NG911 to fruition and make wireless communication in emergencies a reality. Public Service Answering Points (PSAP) must be fully accessible, and text messaging is the most logical answer to that requirement, not only for our consumers but also for hearing individuals that use mobile devices.

The TAP Advisory Board, which consists of consumers, agency oversight representatives, and TAP staff, meets at least once annually; however, the April 2020 meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19 safety precautions. A meeting was held in October, but they did not have a quorum as several members were unable to attend due to a lack of access to reliable broadband internet services and unfamiliarity with the technology required to meet virtually. The full Board was finally able to meet in April, 2021, where three of the current members were given the opportunity to say their farewells, as their terms

expire June 30, 2021. Applicants have submitted resumes and statements of interest and are awaiting approval at the full Commission meeting in July, 2021.

**TAP Advisory Board Members**

<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Membership Status</b>	<b>Term Ends</b>
Gordon-Brown	Gerry	*KCDHH Commissioner/Advisory Board Chair	2021
Ziehr	Jeremiah	*Deaf Consumer	2021
Fowler	Lewis	*Deaf Consumer	2023
Lawson	Johnny	*Speech-Impaired Consumer	2021
Fenwick	Marilyn	*Hard of Hearing Consumer	2023
Timon	James	*Hard of Hearing Consumer	2021
McGirt	Melinda	*Hard of Hearing Consumer	2023
Campbell	Tyler	*KY Telephone Association Representative	Law
Stevens	Jim	**Public Service Commission Representative	Law
Taylor	Jeannie	**KCDHH Commission Chair	Law
Moore	Virginia	**KCDHH Executive Director	Law
Endler-Smith	Jessica	***TAP Program Coordinator	Staff
Stinson	Toni Jo	***Document Processing Specialist I	Staff
Crowe	Tashina	***Interpreter I	Staff
Kitchen	Elise	***Policy Specialist	Staff

***\*voting members    \*\*non-voting members, serve by law or ex-officio    \*\*\*TAP staff***

The former Administrative Specialist II was promoted to Program Coordinator earlier in the year, and interviews were recently conducted to backfill her position. In the meantime, current TAP staff has continued to attend meetings virtually to promote the TAP and train consumers on equipment and policy changes.

**Plans for FY 21-22, not involving Legislative changes, include:**

TAP is administered per KRS 163.525 and continues to grow as demand increases and technology changes to meet the needs of communication access. The selected devices provide affordable, portable, reliable, and accessible telecommunications for all eligible applicants.

KCDHH has been working closely with a database development team to develop a new database capable of handling the anticipated increase in applicants and outreach opportunities in the wake of COVID-19. The database is designed to increase agency efficiency and customer service through accessibility features such as the web-based portal, through which consumers will be able to track the status of their applications.

In addition, KCDHH continues to work with the Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to ameliorate the administration of accurate and thorough hearing screenings at the required grade levels to identify students with a hearing loss. Without proper identification at an early age, specialized resources, and accommodations in the school systems, children cannot acquire language in a timely manner and will continue to experience delays as they progress through the school system. Some of these children are already TAP consumers, and our wireless devices are particularly useful in helping them overcome some of those issues, especially as COVID-19 continues to impact the way in which our schools operate.

The Executive Director, TAP Program Coordinator, and Document Processing Specialist I planned to attend the TEDPA Conference in September 2020, but it was canceled due to COVID-19. The Conference has tentatively been scheduled to resume in 2022, and staff members plan to make every effort to attend, assuming there are no significant conflicts.

KCDHH stays abreast of Federal changes in regulations through TEDPA's Basecamp, which also provides access to information on new technology and equipment used by 38 other equipment distribution programs throughout the nation. Kentucky has traditionally been highlighted as a leader in providing the most advanced telecommunications equipment, and many states have adopted our wireless distribution policy, adding appropriate devices to their programs because of the success of Kentucky's TAP.

### **Legislative Plans for FY 21-22:**

At this time, there are no plans for this program involving legislation; however, we will continue to support legislation involving newborn screenings for congenital cytomegalovirus (cCMV) as well as hearing screenings and language acquisition and access.

### **Outreach Plans for FY 21-22 include partnerships with the following entities:**

- Alexander Graham Bell Association
- American Association of Retired Persons
- Area Developmental Districts
- Audiologists, Hearing Instrument Specialists
- Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs
- First Steps
- Hamilton Telecommunications Relay Service
- Hands & Voices
- Hearing Loss Association of America
- Hospitals across the state
- Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation
- Kentucky Assistive Technology Services Network
- Kentucky Association of the Deaf
- Kentucky Department of Education
- Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives
- Kentucky Office for the Blind
- Kentucky Office of Aging
- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Kentucky School for the Deaf
- Kentucky Telephone Association
- National Association of the Deaf
- Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Veteran's Affairs

***What TAP accomplishes as a program, providing basic telecommunication services, goes to the core of what our consumers are able to give back to society. We impact the lives of these citizens by providing services that allow them to utilize telecommunications, receive emergency notifications should a state or national emergency occur, and participate equitably in everyday work and life activities.***