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MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 1, 2022

TO: Jay D. Hartz, Director
Legislative Research Commission

CC: Jamie Link Secretary
Education and Labor Cabinet

Kent A. Chandler, Chairman
Public Service Commission

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

RE: Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2021-2022

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

If you have any questions, please contact me at 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 21-22.

“Thank you very much! The phone will be a great benefit to me.”

(Hard of Hearing senior – Owensboro)

“Thank you for helping make his life better with this phone”

(Wife of Hard of Hearing Senior – Hopkinsville)

“It’s a miracle! She can hear everything with that phone! We appreciate you working with us on this.”

(Family Member of Hard of Hearing Senior– Florence)

“You all need to pat yourselves on the back every day for the help you give these people.”

(Husband of Hard of Hearing Senior – Topmost)

“I want to express my appreciation for what you all are doing. I’m hard of hearing myself, and it’s really, really wonderful.”

(Hard of Hearing Father of Hard of Hearing Adult – Woodburn)

“Please relay my thankfulness to whoever sponsors the TAP Program. The iPad will assist me with my daily hearing challenge. The TAP Program is a blessing to have for the hearing challenged and deaf community.”

(Hard of Hearing Senior – Louisville)

Thank you for all you do for the deaf community and helping us get iPhones and iPads to assist with communication with the world.

(Deaf Consumer – Lexington)

**Telecommunications Access Program
Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2021-2022**

**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 748 consumers during FY 21-22 and provided 898 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), per KRS 278.5499, 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 21-22, 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. For many in this vulnerable population, these devices, which are preloaded with specialized telecommunications apps, are essential during an emergency. 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.

Hamilton Relay has released their Hamilton Relay Mobile again and it is now compatible with the iOS and Android systems and people are able to use it again.

Traditional outreach activities were still severely curtailed during FY 21-22, but the events are now starting again. Applications for TAP equipment remained low at the end of FY 21-22. However, as offices reopen, 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 are met. 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. Now the awareness has spread across the state and government agencies are more aware of hiring deaf/hard of hearing interpreters for deaf/hoh constituents.

FY 21-22 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 multiple 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 has begun to turn the tide. Subsequent access mapping, the KentuckyWired Project, and the successful passage of House Bills 320 and 382 in 2021, which provided significant funding for Broadband expansion, are helping to ensure that Kentucky is on its way to making strides toward state-wide broadband accessibility in 2022 and ongoing. KCDHH continues to work in partnership 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, regardless of the individual's 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. This partnership has been invaluable, especially during the global pandemic.

Public Relations:

Television advertisements by Hamilton Relay, our state TRS provider, run twice a year showcasing captioned telephones. 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 by the media coverage of the Governor's COVID-19 press conferences for the past 2 ½ years, and subsequent interviews with the Executive Director, have helped to overcome the potential public relations deficit that COVID-19 created.

During FY 21-22, 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
- 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)
- 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 2021-22**

REVENUE	Budgeted Expenditures	Actual Expenditures
FY 2020– 21 Allotment	1,377,700	1,377,700
Total Revenue collected	1,377,700	1,377,700
PERSONNEL EXPENSES		
State Employee Salary	224,800	186,370
State Employee Benefits	176,600	186,735
Other Personnel Services	91,100	89,944
Total Personnel Services	504,600	513,090
OPERATING EXPENSES		
Utilities	5,400	3,579
Other Rentals	36,000	34,494
Maintenance and Repairs	0	0
Postage Services	4,600	1,867
Miscellaneous Services	18,000	17,264
Telecommunications	5,500	1,648
Computer Services	18,400	2,485
Supplies	8,400	6,522
TAP Commodities	1,600	0
TAP Equipment Purchases	725,000	596,874
Travel Expense/ Allowances	15,700	2,648
Miscellaneous Commodities	34,500	34,423
Total Operating Expenses	873,100	701,804
TOTAL EXPENSES	1,377,700	1,164,853
13-33-340-TB00 BALANCE	0	212,847

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, & 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 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 2021, but will again be held in July 2022. This conference provides an essential opportunity to gather information on new and emerging technology and staff look forward to meeting with other state professionals and equipment vendors to learn of new and emerging technology designed to provide equitable access to deaf and hard of hearing equipment vendors. TEDPA's web-based member's program called Basecamp and other virtual/electronic information-sharing platforms also continues to provide alternative methods of ensuring that professionals in the field stay abreast of the latest technology during times between national conferences.

At the beginning of FY 21-22, state government agencies were focused on getting back into a hybrid schedule, which meant TAP Requests for Bids (RFBs) by the Finance Department as Covid needs continue to take precedent. As a result, TAP contracted were held in suspension and 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 in 2022, who were in desperate need of access to telecommunications services, especially as the pandemic subsides. While we continue to operate on emergency contracts, we are researching current needs in order to prepare for new RFBs in FY 22-23.

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 are starting again but on limitations 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 again but taking appointments though. Our seven equipment demonstration Cabinets across the state is going to have new equipment so the equipment's warranty is expired and planning to have a second location set up in Lexington at the Hearing and Speech Center. KCDHH has decided to skip a year at the State Fair to allow us to focus on DeaFestival 2022, which is being hosted in Danville, Kentucky on Labor Day Weekend, in order to reduce the amount of time staff are out of the office for outreach. DeaFestival showcases the talents of deaf and hard of hearing visual and performing artists and is a fantastic means of educating the public regarding the potential opportunity deaf and hard of hearing individuals have to enhance their professions. The festival also educates parents of deaf and hard of hearing children, as to the potential each child holds for their future and the fact that they can be anything they want to be as long as they have accessible communication.

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. This is a global priority that must be enhanced for all Kentucky consumers!

The TAP Advisory Board, which consists of consumers, agency oversight representatives, and TAP staff, meets at least once annually; A meeting was held in October, and not have enough quorum and there were two members' terms expiring and there was a video log hosted by the program coordinator and posted on social media to bring in more applicants for 1 deaf and two speech impaired seats on the board. The applications have been approved by the Commission Board. They are waiting to hear from the new appointed seat members for scheduling times. There will be an orientation for the new appointed seats.

TAP Advisory Board Members

Last Name	First Name	Membership Status	Term Ends
Gordon-Brown	Gerry	*KCDHH Commissioner/Advisory Board Chair	2022
Vacant		*Deaf Consumer	
Fowler	Lewis	*Deaf Consumer	2023
Vacant		*Speech-Impaired Consumer	
Vacant		*Speech-Impaired Consumer	
Fenwick	Marilyn	*Hard of Hearing Consumer	2023
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
Disney	OJ	***Document Processing Specialist I	Staff
Crowe	Tashina	***Interpreter I	Staff
Vacant		***Policy Specialist	Staff

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

The former Document Specialist I was promoted to Administrative Specialist II. The Document Processing Specialist II position is filled. The Administrative Specialist II is vacant now. 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 maintain and finalize 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 and TAP Program Coordinator are planning to attend the TEDPA Conference in July 2022 to obtain information about the new updated equipment and alternate methods of outreach during Covid.

KCDHH stays abreast of Federal changes in regulations through TEDPA's Basecamp, provides access to information on new technology and equipment and is 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, legislation has been passed for "Bella's Bill" involving newborn screenings for congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV), which will improve identification of hearing loss needs in infants/toddlers.

Through enhanced recognition of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing children, hearing screening is improving and KCDHH and its partners, such as Heuser Hearing Institute, Hands and Voices, Kentucky Department of Education, and others, children will be identified sooner and will be provided with the services and technology needed to ensure they meet the standards for their grade level.

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
- Heuser Hearing Institute
- 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.