UNEDITED REALTIME TRANSCRIPT

**Governor’s Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay**

**Board Meeting**

Held via

Zoom

April 16, 2021

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

*REMOTE CAPTIONING PROVIDED BY:*

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**Governor’s Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay**

**Board Meeting**

**April 16, 2021**

**GABTR BOARD MEMBERS:**

Alfred Sonnenstrahl, Acting Chair

Steve Cooper

Jason Corning

Allysa Dittmar

Betty Dodds

Ben Jackson

Deirdre Lynch

Lori Markland

Shannon Minnick

Ken Putkovich

Alex Simmons

Darrin Smith

Sonya Smith

**HAMILTON STAFF:**

Rebecca Miller

Jenny Pearson

Tarita Turner

**TAM STAFF:**

David Bahar, Director

Donna Broadway-Callaman

Travis Dougherty

Kevin Steffy

**HEARING INTERPRETERS:**

Anne Leahy

Anna Rose

David Sabala

**DEAF INTERPRETERS:**

Bradley Christlieb

Stephan Kennedy

**CAPTIONER:**

Natalie Ennis

**GABTR Meeting**

**April 16, 2021**

**9:00 a.m.**

TRAVIS: Just to clarify for everybody, we are just working on the logistics with the interpreters. Please be patient with us. We'll get started in a minute. You're not missing anything.

And we'll wait a few minutes for some more folks to join. There was some confusion about the date of the meeting. We want to make sure our meetings are pretty consistent in terms of day of the week and what time we host them, so we'll watch that for future meetings.

All right. This is Travis. You will want to make sure you're in gallery view. We want to make sure we have accessibility for everyone, which means we will have to spotlight our Certified Deaf Interpreters, which means everyone will have to be cognizant to change back to gallery view. Otherwise, if you're on speaker view, you will only see the CDI. You can change that in the top right-hand corner of your screen. There's a drop down, and you can just select gallery view.

The CDIs will be switching about every 20 minutes, just to give you a heads up.

And I think we are ready to begin. I want to check in with everybody, make sure. I will be responsible for doing the recording. David will do roll call since Al will be late.

Okay. Let's go ahead and get started.

David, if you wouldn't mind taking roll.

DAVID: Yes, good morning, everyone. I'm looking at the participants list. People are still joining. So I'm going to go ahead and take roll call. Al Sonnenstrahl will be a little late and is hoping to arrive soon to the meeting. But we can go ahead and see who is already here.

Allysa Dittmar is here.

Alex Simmons is present.

Darrin Smith is here.

Ken Putkovich. Ken? Let's see. I don't see Ken on the list. Maybe he's not here.

Steve Cooper is present.

STEVE: Good morning. I'm honored to be joining you today.

DAVID: It's great to see you too, Steve. Thank you.

Lori Markland, are you present?

I think I did get an email from Lori that she might be late to the meeting. So perhaps she'll be joining soon.

Jason Corning.

JASON: Good morning. Present and very much excited to be with you today.

DAVID: Great to have you here.

Shannon Minnick?

Number nine was Al, but he will be arriving soon.

How about Deirdre Lynch?

Okay. Further down the list, we have Ben Jackson.

BEN: Hi there, good morning.

DAVID: Great to you have here, Ben. Thank you.

Now some new board members that we have. Glenn Lockhart recently joined a few weeks ago and informed us that he would not be able to make the first meeting. But perhaps we'll be seeing him in the future. Hopefully you will be meeting him very soon.

Last but not least, another board member who is new, Michelle Morales. Are you with us, Michelle?

Okay. We have six board members, if I'm counting right, and seven not present. Unfortunately, we will have to wait for quorum. So we'll have to wait for Al, Michelle, or Lori before we proceed with the meeting. So I think for the time being -- sorry. Go ahead, Darrin. You have a comment?

DARRIN: Yes. So apparently there was a scheduling conflict, and I did let them know that the meeting wasn't in fact yesterday. There was some confusion. So unfortunately that's why certain members weren't able to make it. And that is my error. I take responsibility for that. So that's why certain people aren't in attendance, for example Michelle.

DAVID: Thank you for letting us know.

TRAVIS: Sonya is here.

DAVID: Sonya, from my understanding, from the Governor's appointment office, she wasn't allowed to become a member. However, the most recent conversation with the Governor's appointment office is that she should now be appointed. I think we're just waiting for the Secretary of Appointments to complete the confirmation. So again, just another formality really. But I'm open to having Sonya as a member to count her. Travis, what do you think?

TRAVIS: Well, I would like to invite her, if Sonya is up to it. Sonya, would you mind coming on screen?

SONYA: Hello. Thank you for having me here. I really appreciate it. It's really good to see all of you.

TRAVIS: It's great to have you here too, Sonya.

SONYA: Thank you.

TRAVIS: So I don't have a lot of faith in the government appointment office based on history. I mean, Al for example was interim Chair for quite some time before that issue was resolved. So I'm just kind of thinking out loud. In an act of good faith, I would say I would permit her to become a full member today and then count towards quorum.

DAVID: I think Deirdre is looking for the link, so let me go ahead and email her. Okay. Deirdre should now have the email link and will be joining soon. So that will make quorum. And of course Sonya also. We should be split, 7 present and 7 not present. And then when Al joins, we'll definitely get going with the meeting.

TRAVIS: They're here.

DAVID: All right. She just entered from the waiting room. So hello, Deirdre. Sorry about the confusion with the link. I'm hoping you can hear us.

Deirdre, are you there?

DEIRDRE: Yes, I'm here. And thank you for sending the link. Thank you. Do you need me to be on camera?

DAVID: I got you, Deirdre. If you would like to be on camera, there you go.

DEIRDRE: Okay. Thanks.

DAVID: Great. Good morning. It's nice to see you here with us.

DEIRDRE: Thank you.

DAVID: I was telling the board that you are our quorum-making member. So Al, the Chair, is now en route to his laptop so he can host the meeting. He had another urgent appointment he had to take care of. So we told him that I would start with the roll call before he actually gets here. So that's what we're doing right now.

There are a few updates for the board members to know of, and those are some of the new members. Ben Jackson is now a member. And I think this is his second meeting. Right? Hi, Ben. There's Ben. Great. Did you want to say something? You're on mute, Ben.

BEN: Sorry. I'm using the phone audio and the computer audio and I don't know which one is working because Zoom said it wasn't working initially. So sorry.

DAVID: Gotcha. No problem. Seems like we can hear you fine. Everything is worked out.

So let's see. We also have Glenn Lockhart, who is a new board member. Went to Gallaudet University. Couldn't join us today. So after he was appointed, he had some other conflicts. So he will be joining future meetings.

Michelle Morales is also another new member to the board, representing the Deaf and hard of hearing community, the same as Glenn Lockhart. So it seems like they had some schedule conflicts. So they will come to the next meeting.

And lastly, Sonya Smith, who is from the office of the Deaf and hard of hearing, who recently joined Kelby's office. Similar role to what TraciAnn Hoglind had before, as program coordinator. Sonya, if you want to pop up again and say hi. I think you already did.

SONYA: Can you see me?

DAVID: Yes. I didn't know if you wanted to briefly introduce yourself.

SONYA: Absolutely. Sure.

My name is Sonya Smith, born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, graduated from the Rochester Institute of Technology, moved here about 4 years ago. I used to work as a job coach, providing support. I was also Miss Black America and was in that pageant as well. So that's a little bit more of my history. And I also worked as an accountability manager for another forum before I transitioned to my current position. So I'm new to the state of Maryland, working for the Governor's Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

DAVID: Great. Thanks for joining Kelby's office. We'll be seeing a lot of you.

SONYA: Absolutely. I'm looking forward to working with everybody and looking forward to meeting everyone.

DAVID: Definitely. In-person meetings for the future are definitely on our wish list.

I did notice Shannon Minnick just joined. Shannon, are you able to hear us?

SHANNON: Yes, I can hear you.

DAVID: Wonderful. Great. Greetings to Shannon.

SHANNON: Hello, everyone.

TRAVIS: Ken just reached out to me. This is Travis. I'm going to be sending him the link to make sure he can get in to the meeting as well.

DAVID: All right. Looks like people are trickling in. So we'll have everyone pretty much, except some of the members who couldn't make it today. Al should be here really soon. Lori will be here soon as well, we were just informed. And hopefully Ken will make it as well.

I think the best thing to do right now -- hang on. I think Al just joined. Al's here. Okay. It might take just a few seconds for him to set up.

AL: I'm here. This is Al.

INTERPRETER: Travis, the CDIs are getting ready to switch.

AL: This is Al. Can everybody see me?

DAVID: We sure can. Good morning, Al.

AL: My apologies for my tardiness.

DAVID: No worries. Just to let you know, Al, Allysa Dittmar is here --

JASON: Not to interrupt. Excuse me. We need to spotlight the CDI.

DAVID: Shannon Minnick, Steve Cooper, Deirdre Lynch, Ben Jackson. And I think Ken will be joining soon. Lori will be joining soon. So we do have a quorum. I just want to let you know we're okay to start the meeting. And Lori is here now, so that's good.

TRAVIS: If I could interrupt for one minute. This is Travis. Before we proceed any further, I'm sorry to interrupt. I just want to provide a little bit of logistical clarification. I'm going to ask everybody to make sure you go to gallery view, located in the top right-hand corner of your screen if you're on a laptop or a desktop, because we just switched the spotlight to the other CDI. Gallery view will allow you to see everybody.

AL: This is Al. So we should all be using gallery view?

DAVID: Right. If you don't need to spotlight or look solely at the CDI, the Deaf interpreter, then you can be on gallery view, but that's at your discretion.

AL: Okay. And everybody should also be on mute, correct, if you're not speaking. Or you should not have your video on.

DAVID: Generally, if somebody is speaking, I'm hoping that others will be off video and muted.

AL: All right. Well, then, David, are you ready to proceed with your report? Then I'll turn my video off.

DAVID: Sure can.

Good morning, everyone. I'm sorry for the late start to the meeting. We were getting everything squared away. But now it looks great.

So the first thing I want to do is just to update everybody about our staffing situation. We are in the process of hiring a couple of positions. One is a finance manager, who will be responsible for the finance aspect, the budget aspect of the agency. They'll be working a lot with the office of disabilities, and anybody who handles a lot of financial needs. So this person needs to be really savvy with finances and budgetary things. So hopefully this person will be appointed and hired soon, within the next 1-2 months. At least that's our goal.

The second position is the MAT manager. We're recruiting for that specialist. Hopefully in a couple weeks. We'll keep working on that. Kevin runs the MAT program. They do evaluations, installations, review all of the applications, so on and so forth. Those are the two positions we're looking for, our staffing needs.

Latricia Lee was supporting Kevin since October. She unfortunately has left for another agency for a full-time position. We wish her the best. She did quite a bit for us within that brief short 6 months.

The senior call check program, the board has been discussing this quite a bit recently.

AL: If I could interrupt, Betty, we can see you. If you could turn your videocamera off. It just saves the screen real estate for everybody. But welcome.

DAVID: Hello to both of you. I just wanted to say hi, Betty, hi, Ken. I'm doing my report right now, just to let you know.

The senior call check program. It is something that the board has been looking at. The costs have been going up for that program. And because we were given money, we want to justify our investment in that program. So we called a meeting with the Department of Aging recently and had a discussion about the program. So they're sharing some regular invoices with us, and we have agreed to be more transparent going forward. We did notice as well the senior call check program. The goal is to serve senior citizens around the state, to call in, check if they're okay. And if you hear no response, then somebody will go on and do a wellness check. But it's all done by phone, so we wonder what happens to people who are hard of hearing and can't use the regular telephone.

So the senior call check program, as we see it, is not accessible to our community.

The Deputy Secretary of the office of disabilities, Bernice Hutchinson, mid-February I think it was, sat down and explained how to improve some of these accessibility features for the senior call check program, how to provide better support, and we offered resources from our side and from our vendor, Hamilton, and from our personal knowledge and networking and some of our ideas, we offered that to them.

They have made no commitments to address making any kind of changes to the program yet, but we keep in contact with them and encourage them to make this program accessible. I mean, the purpose is that we need to offer accessibility for this program. So hopefully we will see some positive changes for this program and making it more accessible in the future.

Now, updates for the board, I'll just briefly touch on some of these. I want to recognize a few who have joined this first meeting. A couple of people are not here. Michelle Morales, who recently joined the board, representing the Deaf and hard of hearing community. We have Sonya Smith as well who is joining. Her role is as a member from the office of the Deaf and hard of hearing. And we also have Glenn Lockhart who joined recently on the board, who is also a representative of the Deaf and hard of hearing community. We also have with us Steve Cooper. We just saw him briefly during our roll call when we were meeting everybody. He is a new member as well and representing the speech disabled community.

Steve, I know you haven't really had a clans to introduce yourself. If you would like to come up and give us some background, maybe that's a good time to make an introduction.

STEVE: Thank you. As David said, my name is Steve Cooper. I'm a total laryngectomy. I had surgery and now through a prosthesis, it enables me to speak.

I was honored to participate in the Governor's board, to represent the speech disabled community. And hopefully I can learn from everyone on GABTR and maybe bring some insight from the issues that we face. And again, it's an honor to be with everyone. Thank you.

DAVID: Thank you, Steve. Really appreciate it.

So yes, about the laryngectomy and being a representative from that community, we'll host some focus groups. It's good to have you a part of the meeting so we can gain from your knowledge and information that you bring to us, which leads us hopefully to some growth in our program for our speech disabled group.

STEVE: As you know, we had a laryngectomy club meeting of Montgomery County, and we had people from all over the world, laryngectomies, other cancer patients, many people from Maryland Relay, which I very much appreciated, Hamilton Relay, and it was an amazing opportunity for everyone to meet from all sides and understand the different issues we all face.

We've already instituted digital outreach for MAT in the laryngectomy community, and we're going to continue to work on that outreach.

We are a very, very underserved population. There's only roughly 50,000 laryngectomies in the United States. That's out of 359 million people. We're something like .0006 of the population. So understandably our needs are not met, but it shouldn't be an obstacle to be able to provide outreach. That's my goal. So as I said, I'm really looking forward to interacting with everyone.

One last thing I forgot. I'm a lifelong resident of Maryland. I was born in Riverdale. I grew up in Takoma Park. Silver Spring. And now I've been living in Potomac for about 38 years. So it's a great state to be in.

DAVID: Well, again, thank you for everything, Steve. Really appreciate it.

AL: This is Al here. I think I missed the number of speech disabled folks in the U.S. How many again was it?

STEVE: Not speech disabled. Laryngectomies, the surgery which removes your vocal cords. There's approximately 50,000 in the United States. It's a micropopulation.

DAVID: All right. Thank you so much. Do we have a question?

AL: This is Al again. I'm just wondering, are these people utilizing the speech-to-speech program? Would they be candidates for that?

STEVE: Tarita gave a wonderful presentation on Wednesday to our laryngectomy club, and that was speech to speech or specifically visual speech to speech. Many people speak with an electrolarynx, which I can demonstrate later, but it makes it very, very hard to be understood on the telephone. And so the visual speech to speech is a great tool. If the listener cannot understand me, the interpreter, you know, facial expressions and everything else, that will aid them in relaying the call. Those two programs, speech to speech and visual speech to speech, are probably the biggest programs that, at least the -- you know, speech disabled can take advantage of maybe someone with a stroke that is having issues speaking clearly, visual speech to speech would be a great tool.

The other tools that Maryland provides on the equipment side is a teletalk system which is an electrolarynx or artificial larynx that allows us to hook up to a telephone. Or it can be carried remotely. For many laryngectomies, that's the only way they can speak, with an artificial larynx.

I've had a prosthesis implanted. If I don't put my finger on this button on my neck, I can't speak. So if I put my hands down, I cannot speak. But I want to show you quickly the prosthesis. It's this tiny. It's a little valve about the size of the tip of your small finger. And it lays between the trachea and the esophagus and allows air to pass up into the esophagus. Instead of vocal cords vibrating, my esophagus is actually vibrating.

But between the speech to speech, a lot of the apps are valuable. There's some laryngectomies that are glossectomies as well, and they have no ability to speak at all. So it's strictly written communication. So just to kind of say, between speech to speech, the equipment, and the apps, those are very relevant to the speech disabled community.

DAVID: Thank you, Steve. I really appreciate the demonstrations and the explanations. I know during the meeting with the laryngectomy group, they took well to the speech-to-speech program, but they didn't have a lot of knowledge about it. So they're advertising and marketing there. That needs to be better. But we're glad to have you here to share more of the information so we have a more targeted plan to do this kind of outreach. So hopefully we'll be able to connect with these members of this community better.

STEVE: Yes, thank you. One challenge is we're an older population. The average age is at least 65-70, or older. So some of the technology creates a challenge. Tarita just was kind enough to put in the chat that HCO, hearing carryover, is the other service that bodes well. And I've actually used that. I used that at the beginning before I received my voice prosthesis. I could not be understood on a phone call, so I would have to have someone else make the call for me, which is very, very frustrating. Imagine trying to deal with an insurance company after a major, major operation, and they don't offer email, so phone contact is the only contact way you can communicate with them. Yet you cannot speak properly on the phone. And you know, I think I'm preaching to the choir here, but the hearing carryover was very helpful as well.

DAVID: Thank you for that, Steve.

Okay. I guess we'll go ahead and move over to the last part of my director's report. Some regulatory issues here. I know that everybody is familiar with real-time text, RTT, which allows for simultaneous text, like on your phone or on the computer. That is included in our new telecommunications contract. So hopefully we want to have the technology available to us, and we want to offer RTT for relay, for audio, text, all of that given simultaneously.

The FCC has several rules and requirements for phone companies, like AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile, the big phone companies. They are required to support this technology, the RTT technology. So 711 is required to provide that technology. I know we demoed what the RTT technology looked like before, but even though the FCC requires companies to support RTT technology, we've noticed that they are unable at this time to support it via the 711 dialing. So the technology right now just isn't consistent with it.

So right now when you dial 711, it automatically goes in to a TTY call. RTT is internet based, and TTY technology is an older technology. TTY is only one way. It only allows for, what, 80 characters per second, I believe, which is not very fast. And people can type faster than that. It's a little bit slower. And TTY is also analogue-based technology, whereas RTT is digital. So having the digital and analogue transferring creates for a very awkward experience. So we have noticed that people calling in to 711, trying to use RTT, it goes to a TTY kind of technology, even though the FCC is requiring this technology to be better.

So we're taking notes and documenting experiences, and we've already shared our concerns with the FCC, who is the leading authority for these regulations.

We're having conversations with the trade groups and with the carriers, with CTIA. I can't tell you what that acronym is at the moment. I think it's Cellular Telecommunications, something like that. We got with CTIA and had some discussion on the rules and the requirements for RTT, but we're just not there yet. So they'll be sharing more information with us when that information is available. But basically the situation is, FCC has the rules, has the requirements, but they are not being adhered to from the industry side. We don't know yet what kind of applications or what will happen in the future or what implications of what will happen in the future, but we hope it keep pushing forward with the RTT technology for our community. That is our sole goal here. There's a lot of moving pieces, but we hope to make it happen.

And that wraps up my director's report. I think I had a slide for questions, but because we started late, I think I'll go ahead and hold on to those until the end. I will go ahead and let Travis take over for the rest of the meeting. Is that okay, Al?

TRAVIS: Al, are we okay to proceed with Travis' report?

AL: This is Al. Absolutely.

TRAVIS: Good morning, everyone. Happy to see everyone here today. Very much appreciate you joining us. Again, to clarify, make sure that you are currently in gallery view so you can see everyone on the screen.

Interpreters, please remind me or let me know if my video starts to pixelate. I am streaming this meeting to Facebook as well as recording at the same time on my computer. So I just want to make sure that everything is operating clearly. So if I freeze, please let me know.

Okay. So I'm going to start off by talking about the RTT Revolution. This was hosted by Maryland Relay in conjunction with NASRA. It was a fantastic event. We had a fantastic turnout. We were able to get the word out and share a lot of information.

Just checking in, it looks like my video is freezing a little bit.

As I mentioned, we had a wonderful turnout for the RTT Revolution event. We actually maxed out our Zoom platform and couldn't admit any more attendees, which has made us upgrade to the next Zoom level, which we'll be mentioning later on. But really and truly fantastic event. We had an opportunity to educate other state relay administrators as well as some PSAPs, the emergency call centers. People were very enthusiastic with follow up. A lot of folks reached out to me after the presentation asking how they could work on getting RTT included in their next RFP process for their own state.

And also how they can provide education for the PSAPs in their own states.

So we've seen a lot of progress on that front.

In addition to that, NASRA appointed me to be a member of the FCC disability access commission or DAC. We had our first meeting that I was in attendance of about a month ago. We don't have the official dates for any upcoming meetings because they're in the process of transitioning to a new President. So once all of those logistics are worked out, they will post the meetings for the remainder of the year, and I will make sure to keep you posted in terms of what is happening with that. And we're very, very excited about that.

Now, my next slide speaks to RCC. Since March of 2020 that has been a focus of mine. I've pretty much been learning in real time how RCC works, how we can implement it, how we can utilize it to improve our services. We've made improvements to the RCC service itself. For example, it is now able to be embedded within a Zoom meeting. We've also changed some of the protocols, for example, we're asking the captioner to arrive 5 minutes early so they can work out technological logistics and make sure the meeting starts smoothly and on time. And we have steadily seen in the state of Maryland our minutes increase. They're at the highest now that they've ever been, which is very exciting, and we've been able to see that tangible growth. We're anticipating seeing in excess of 10,000 minutes a month very soon.

We're seeing more users for the RCC service. Many folks are reaching out to us through Hamilton to see how they can implement RCC themselves. So very thrilled to see that type of growth as well.

What we're currently doing in our next steps when it comes to RCC is we're hosting some focus groups. Some of our board members here have actually participated. And the purpose of those focus groups for RCC is really to establish some guidelines, so rules and protocols for the state of Maryland specific to how RCC is going to operate. Understand that no two states operate the same. So we really want the state of Maryland to help us decide how we're going to operate for RCC services here specifically, what that will look like. And that's really the purpose of the focus groups is to start to gather some feedback as it comes to that. And we're still in the process of doing that. We just had one last week, and we're going to have several more.

Next steps is that we're going to host an RCC panel to further that discussion. That will, again, be hosted by NASRA. It will be their second webinar. I'm going to be serving as moderator for that event. That's going to be April 20th, 3:00-4:00 p.m., for those who would like to attend. We're going to invite several different states. Colorado will be present as a panelist. Maine, Montana, and Wyoming, I believe. So they will be our panelists. And we're going to have hopefully a very good discussion about how they are running that individually in their states, some of the biggest challenges they've faced with RCC, any frustrations or growing pains they might have experienced, and can share lessons they have learned and what they're envisioning RCC to look like in their states in the future.

So really it will be an opportunity for information sharing so we can help each other in the implementation of these programs. My understanding is only currently about 10 states have RCC capabilities as part of the services they offer. Only 10. That's not that many. So I think one of the goals of the panel discussion is to encourage some of the other states to get involved in providing this service.

Also, we want to develop some SOPs, some standing operating procedures, some guidelines, and then hopefully that will kind of segue into later on a more robust RTT discussion.

I've also invited the focus group members to attend the panel discussion. At the conclusion of the panel discussion, we'll be sending out a survey to everyone to get their thoughts. There's a lot of questions that people have. There's a lot of questions that we have. Not only in watching the panel, but also having the hands-on experience of making a request for RCC. So we've had a lot of great questions. For example, some of the questions have been, for example, should I allow a person, what should be the turnaround time? 12 hours? Should we allow one person to make multiple requests, for example, 40 requests in one day, is that permissible?

Should there be a database of users, a platform that needs to be established to make sure that there's no type of fraud? Should we have something like on demand RCC? So just a variety of different questions that pretty much come out of these types of events.

We want to have a unanimous or at least majority decision on guidelines for how to operate this service going forward. And we'll be doing that with our relay provider, Hamilton, to make any improvements to our RCC service enhancements and things of that nature.

So a lot is happening. All of it very exciting to see.

Now, on a totally different topic, STS, speech to speech, just to let everybody know, our numbers have recently gone up higher than they've ever been for STS. So Steve, your participation in the board might be helping to influence that upward tick in numbers, but definitely our STS is growing in tandem with the RCC. So we're noticing a spike, a growth in both of those service areas, which is great to see.

And I believe that concludes my report for now. So we'll hold questions to the end. As David mentioned, we have time allotted for that hopefully. And at this point, I believe I'm going to be turning it over to -- let me reference my agenda real quick -- Kevin Steffy at this point. With Al's permission to proceed, of course. Al, do we have permission to turn things over to Kevin for his report?

All right. I'm going to assume that permission has been granted. So we'll turn things over to Kevin.

AL: Hang on here. This is Al. I want to make this clear to everyone, to hold your questions, write them down. We'll have the reports and then later we will ask questions. Does that sound good? So we'll just put them on hold until the end. Thank you.

KEVIN: Good morning, I'm Kevin Steffy. Happy Friday, everybody. This is the Maryland Accessibility Telecommunications report.

Next slide. These are general updates. Some of the numbers that we have, I wanted to share. For the third quarter, we have some of the numbers shown here. 48 new applications, we distributed 59 pieces of equipment for the full quarter. The second quarter we distributed 115. That is a difference of 59 pieces of equipment.

Our evaluators currently are doing evaluations troubleshooting and doing various activities remotely still, as of now, because of the pandemic.

Going to my next slide. For the quarter from January-March, we have the numbers of each device that we distributed. So I'll give everybody a few seconds if you would like to look at that slide.

You can also see the number break down by county, again, for the last quarter.

And then on the next slide, this is our total numbers for the last three-quarters, July 2020 to March of 2021. So you can see the numbers for each piece of equipment.

And then on the next slide in the PowerPoint that was sent out, this is the same information, again, totals from July of last year through March of this year, broken down by county in terms of how many pieces of equipment were distributed to each county.

The next slide and the next thing I want to talk about is the focus groups that we hosted. They were focus group webinars. We began in December. We reported that we were planning on hosting our first webinar for our hard of hearing demographic. Since that time, from January-March, we have completed four of those webinars for our low vision/blind clients, our individuals that we serve with cognitive challenges, folks with speech disabilities, and then our constituents with mobility issues. And I want to give a huge thanks to our evaluators who helped facilitate those focus groups, those webinars. We had Brenda Bush, who contributed. We also had Janet Park, and we had Betsy Hein. The three of them did a huge amount of work. We couldn't have done it without them. They did an excellent job.

Now, on the following slide, it breaks down each focus group and the pieces of equipment that we demonstrated during that particular webinar. It also includes the number of participants that we had in those particular webinars. Our goal was to have 10 participants for each focus group, for each webinar. Now, that being said, unfortunately with the times we're in with COVID, we had to transition to an online platform, and some people weren't very Zoom savvy or they had a scheduling conflict that day, so we went ahead with the number of people who were able to participate, although our goal was 10.

Some of the equipment you see we demoed in these was fantastic. For example, in our low vision group, when he something called the Blind Shell Classic, which was fantastic, a mobile device specifically for our blind community. When you press a number, it will speak that number back so you can double check who you're calling. It also has speed dial where you with program in names and numbers. And again, everything is audio and has voice play back, which is fantastic. I think it's fantastic for the blind community because it gives them a mobile option for their telecommunication needs instead of having to rely on hardwired options in their home.

Now, for our cognitive group, one of the pieces that we demoed was the RAZ Mobility Memory phone. That's fantastic for individuals who, for example, are suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's, those types of challenges. Oftentimes they might struggle to remember the numbers of family members or friends. However, in lieu of numbers on the buttons, you can have pictures and they're able to dial based on picture recognition, which is fantastic. So they look at the picture of mom and they're able to call mom.

And in addition to that, if someone calls in on their phone, a picture will show up on their screen so they can feel confident when they answer the phone.

For our speech disabled population, there are now so many apps available to provide support to those with speech difficulties, like Steve mentioned. He was actually a member of that particular focus group, which was fantastic. There's just more and more technology coming out now. Also a lot more mobile options that are available. So you have the option of being able to, for example, have something that assists you in revoicing your speech while you're on the go.

One of the newest apps is called Voiceitt, it actually will acclimate itself to an individual's particular speech pattern. So if somebody's speech is very unique and it's difficult for others to understand, that software will become acclimated to that person's speech and be able to translate in voiceover.

In addition to that, it can recognize different languages, which is really, really unique and exciting.

And then last but not least, for our mobility focus group, one of the pieces that we demoed was called GlassOuse. It is actually a portmanteau of glass and mouse. Essentially it's for individuals who have limited mobility in their arms. Typically this is a typical mouse for a computer and it is not accessible. So there is a device almost like a headset that you wear, and it is controlled with a stylus that you manipulate with your mouth. And then you can do all of the functions that a regular mouse allows you to do using either an iPhone, iPad, laptop, or desktop computer.

We had an individual from the state of Maryland, the Department of Disabilities, Bong. He works for the Department of Disabilities. He is a member of that community, and he was willing to test out the GlassOuse for us. He gave us very positive feedback on that particular piece of equipment.

We have two webinars left to yet host, one for our Deaf community and one for our deafblind community. Those will be coming up soon, and I will be reporting on the results of those two at our next GABTR meeting.

Okay. The next slide that was sent out to everyone -- and one second while we switch our CDI interpreters.

We're just waiting one second while the next interpreter is spotlighted.

All right. Fantastic. The next thing I want to speak to is our MAT application. If you remember at our previous meeting, I spoke about the fact that we were in process of getting that new application completed. It has been completed. I'm happy to report it's been printed and sent out. This is what it looks like for those of you who can see me here on the screen. So we're very excited to get that out there. We are noticing yes starting to receive back some of those new applications. We still have some old ones coming in, but we're getting the new ones as well.

Our PR company, Devaney, as well as Donna and myself, are now working on a Braille version of the application to be coming out soon, as well as a large print edition. In addition to that, we will have one translated into Spanish. So those are the next things on the agenda for the application. We're only going to be printing small numbers of each of those because we don't distribute them in the same volumes as we do our regular application.

Now, you'll see on the next slide that was sent out, our assistive technology communications equipment, also known as ATE. The requests for proposals or RFP. I want to give you a status update on that.

We had sent out and opened it up for bidding. We had received some bids online from various vendors. However, unfortunately there were some vendors who didn't send in the correct information, the required information. Some people sent in incorrect information. There were some people who sent in a no bid for specific functional areas, which we abbreviate FA. Particularly for function area one, we have a total of 11 functional areas that we're required to serve. Some of you may be wondering what a functional area is. Functional area one is for amplified phones, to give you an example. Functional area two is for alternative devices. Functional area three is for captioned phones, so forth and so on. So each functional area focuses on a different type of equipment. And we received no bids for functional area one, and that is probably one of the highest one of our top devices that we distribute, is amplified phones. So we're not able to move forward without bids in that particular functional area.

So the head of the procurement department took a look at this. And really the question was why didn't we get any bids for that. So we've actually had to cancel the solicitation for the RFP and extend the current RFP contract for an additional year. Basically we're then going to do a deeper dive into the RFP, why we didn't get those bids, and we will resubmit it. We're also going to attach a checklist to the RFP when it goes out to help make sure the vendors submit all the appropriate documentation and they don't miss anything so it doesn't invalidate their bid.

It's unfortunate. We're going to have to use the current contract for another year. But it is what it is.

All right. If you look to the next slide, prior to COVID, we had been exploring our evaluation centers and how many clients when he coming in to those evaluation centers. Really we came to find that things were disproportional. So we had to evaluate the location of our centers and which ones were serving the most clients. And we noticed that really an underserved population of the state was the northeast section of the state, Harford and Cecil Counties primarily. Anybody from those areas would have to drive all the way down to our Baltimore office or to our Eastern Shore location in order to get services. For many clients, that's extremely difficult. So in that case, our evaluators would have to drive up to that northeast corner of the state to meet with those individuals and bring the equipment with them.

Since now TAM and subsequently MAT has transferred under the Department of Disabilities, Department of Disabilities also houses the MDTAP, Maryland Technical Assistance Program. Lori Markland, one of our board members, is actually the director of MDTAP. Since we are under the same Department of Disabilities now, MDOD, we thought we should join forces and collaborate. Maybe utilize some of the same spaces. Their technical assistance equipment and our telecommunications assistive equipment really could be evaluated, those evaluations could happen in the same centers. So they also were experiencing the same problem of not really having a space to do evaluations in the northeast area of Maryland. So Lori and I started reaching out to different areas in the northeast area of Maryland. DORS in Elkton, in Cecil County, we were able to get in contact with them. In addition to that, the Arc in Aberdeen, Harford County, we reached out to them. We're currently working on an MOU to contract with both of those entities to provide an evaluation space. So we will have an evaluation space hopefully moving forward in both of those areas so clients in those two counties can go somewhere local instead of having to drive down to Baltimore.

Now, in addition to that, the next slide you would see I didn't actually add. I'll just share the information with you. I want to speak a little bit about our communication facilitator service and program and where we are with that. With COVID of course, that's certainly impacted things. We now have some interns working with us as we look at how to address that. Rachel Horowitz from the Department of Rehabilitation Services, who is their deafblind specialist, we've pulled her in for conversations. Nai Damato, formerly with Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind. We have pulled them into the discussions. So really we're trying to get some feedback on the development of policies, on rules, on regulations, on criteria for this communication facilitator program so we can really start moving forward with that. And it's a very, very exciting time. We will have more to report out on our progress at the next GABTR meeting.

And that concludes my report since we're holding questions to the end. I will turn it over at this point to Donna.

DONNA: Good morning, everyone. Happy Friday.

On the outreach side, we have finished the majority of our efforts and we're now focused on updating our website. So because we recently made the switch from the Department of Disabilities, our website is still under DoIT, so we're kind of updating two websites at the same time. We are working on a DOD website. DoIT is making updates to the website that we currently have, and then DoD, which is hosted by the Department of Commerce, and I think they have a platform with DoIT, they're creating a website for us. So I know I said in the report that there was no update, but I just heard from the contact at DoIT, and they are going to get to updating our website. So they're asking if we have anything else that we want to add. So I'm speaking with them now. I just got that email.

There was a little bit of a delay in updating the website because COVID and the vaccinations took priority. There are some people still working on the COVID and vaccinations, but because that's kind of lessened a bit, they're able to work on our website.

So I don't know the time line. I don't know what this means in terms of immediacy, but it is an update. So there is a possibility that in-person events will start again. The Maryland Municipal League MML conference is scheduled for an event in late June, July, and the Maryland association of counties is scheduled for an in-person event in August. And the Maryland chairs association is having an in-person event and there are a few other in-person events. Even though there are some restrictions being lifted by Governor Hogan, and he expects a sense of normalcy by Memorial Day, it hasn't been clear to return to in person and the TAM staff will not require them to attend in-person events until they're comfortable, and frankly, the numbers are rising. So even with vaccinations, we have to wait a little bit of time for them to work. So the numbers are not going down as we hoped. They are increasing. So we just kind of have to take a wait and see approach. But as I said, we are not forcing the outreach coordinators to go back into the field if they are uncomfortable.

And we are working with the MAT program to promote CapTel and other services. We have created new collateral and we are working on the lunch and run programs, which will be available in each county in Baltimore City. We're also working on creating our new vans. We're working on creating materials for when we do return to the field, like tablecloths, table runners, banner stands, things of that sort. And then we are still staying connected the way we have been during COVID-19: Advertisement, webinars, mailings, virtual events, networking, making contacts. I don't know if you can see this. I got this in the mail. This is one of our ads. This is Maryland Relay ad on an MPT program guide. So our advertisements are working.

And then we are also looking forward to having our 30th anniversary celebration. So this year is the 30th anniversary of TAM as an agency. So the first Maryland Relay phone call was taken in December of 1991. But we're going to have the event in July. So we're going to have a virtual event due to COVID restrictions, but next year we are looking forward to having an in-person event, and I hope everybody will attend..

So that's pretty much my report. I know we are holding questions until later, so thank you so much and have a good weekend.

TRAVIS: Al, that concludes all of the TAM reports. Are we ready to open things up for questions?

AL: Sure. Good job, everybody. This is Al. I know I had on the list Glenn Lockhart couldn't come today, but I was just starting to read some of these questions, the list of questions. So I'm wondering if maybe if the board members currently have any questions in regards to the reports from our wonderful staff. Does anyone have any questions?

DARRIN: This is Darrin. I actually have a question. So for the RTT administration and management, so you mentioned the carriers, T-Mobile, Verizon, and AT&T, and wanting to have conversations with them. Based on the conversations that you have had, do you sense a willingness on the part of the carriers to make the necessary changes in order to make RTT pass through compatible? Or is this something that we should not expect as customers or consumers?

DAVID: Hi, everybody. This is David. I can respond to Darrin's question.

Right now we have had some success with Verizon. We've gained some traction there. We meet quite regularly with them and Hamilton, the Hamilton team. And we've been discussing a time line for them to support 711 and RTT. Currently they can't support the RTT technology, but I think at the end of 2021, or early 2022, they said they would foresee the ability to have that technology.

So that's some good news that we heard.

As far as T-Mobile and AT&T, those carriers have not been too responsive to our emails or our outreach. Hamilton has been trying to make phone calls to them. So we're at a bit of an impasse with them. But at least Verizon is good news because we're making progress. So they can set an example. They can set a standard on how to run RTT and how to implement it. So hopefully other carriers will take that as a lead.

We really need everybody's support to go in the right direction with this. We're going in the right direction, though. I hope that answers your question, Darrin.

INTERPRETER: One second while we switch interpreters.

AL: All right. This is Al speaking. While we're on the topic of RTT, Hamilton has posed a question about what this particular service means for TRS vendors, in particular Hamilton, and what the proposed impact of RTT might be on the TRS industry or vice versa.

DAVID: This is David speaking. Travis, I'll let you field that one.

TRAVIS: So this is Travis. I'm not sure if I'm understanding the question clearly.

DAVID: Travis, I think what he was getting at is really a foundational question of what the impact of RTT might be on the industry at large. How will the use of RTT influence TRS.

TRAVIS: All right. This is Travis. So right now when it comes to Maryland Relay, okay, really four things that I can speak to. The first, the cost of RTT is the same price point as TRS services per minute. So there's no change in terms of cost or impact fiscally.

RTT uses digital lines. It's IP based, as we mentioned. Therefore, it can be accessible on mobile devices, whereas TTY is analogue only and therefore not accessible. Well, it has limitations at any rate. And a lot of digital lines are replacing analogue lines, and when that happens, TTY becomes obsolete.

Hamilton is in the process of testing their own RTT landline phones, wire line trials, and we're hoping in the future that will replace antiquated TTY lines.

I see RTT as a supplement service, not intended to eradicate or replace TTY, but to supplement it. TRS in general, in the last 10 years, the minutes have been on a steady decline due to new technology communication methods that have come into play in the field. So we're hoping that RTT will stabilize that drop. It's going to be a public telecommunication relay service. And by being embed, native to not all but most mobile technology out there, the most recent phone versions all have native RTT service within their operating systems, that should help with that. So I kind of hope that explains the influence of RTT.

AL: Yes, thank you. I'm sure that you mean that it applies to IP relay, perhaps not TTY relay, Travis.

TRAVIS: Well, it is an IP-based relay, yes. It's not an iPad. It's IP-based relay. It has the ability to have simultaneous communication. For example, you can be using it in a text format as well as voice at the same time. You can also, for example, send pictures or videos. That's going to be a possibility. So it's simultaneous. Those characters are coming up in real time. It's more efficient. It's faster. It is that simultaneous natural communication rather than turn taking.

AL: Very good.

Are there any questions directly about RTT at this stage?

Seeing none, let's move on to a question about RCC. RCC outreach. Are there any plans to simplify the URLs for making requests for Marylanders? And how has outreach been performing?

TRAVIS: All right. This is Travis. So how to simplify the URL, I can speak to that first. We've developed Maryland RCC -- I'm trying to remember their website. I think it's Marylandrcc.com. Oh, thank you. Melissa just typed it into the chat box. Marylandrcc.com. That takes you to a landing page. We are hoping, again, based on focus groups, that the request form will be put on to that website, and that website will become our roster, our registration database for people to go in and make requests. So that will hopefully simplify and streamline the process, that web page. We're thinking that's going to solve and simplify the URL issue. So Marylandrcc.com.

AL: .gov or .com?

TRAVIS: .com.

AL: I thought all of ours were going through a .gov.

TRAVIS: Not all. Marylandrelay.com is not a .gov. Not all of our addresses are a .gov.

AL: Really! All right. Well, I'll invite any questions regarding RCC.

TRAVIS: I saw Steve come up briefly.

DONNA: I think someone asked the question how outreach was doing with RCC. I know Jenny, Tarita, and Rebecca, they have been promoting RCC too --

AL: Hold on just a second, Donna. Steve, could you take down your video for just a second.

Can you say that again, Donna?

DONNA: I know someone had a question in regards to how outreach was doing with RCC and how we were promoting RCC. I think that was the second part of a question. So I can say that our outreach coordinators have been working very hard to promote it to our community partners. Tarita, Jenny, and Rebecca have been promoting that and we've seen an increase in RCC requests. We're promoting this service as much as possible.

AL: Thank you very much for the clarification.

Steve, I would love to see you and have your question.

STEVE: I'm sorry. I have an observation --

AL: I do apologize, Steve. May I ask firstly, before you give your question, when you're on the screen, before you start to speak, just make sure we have an interpreter up. We'll just wait for the interpreter to pop up as well. Which he now is. So proceed.

STEVE: I'll start over. This is Steve. I have an observation that I would like to sort of turn into a question, and it's directed to Hamilton. As Travis mentioned, I'm a participant in the RCC focus group, and he asked us to try using RCC for one of our meetings in advance, which we did. I scheduled it late last week for this past Wednesday. I followed the frequently asked questions that Hamilton provided as far as enabling RCC on Zoom. And at the start of the meeting, they were not able to bring the captions up and they said it was not configured on my end.

I did go in and check the configuration on Zoom and captioning was enabled, and Tarita can vouch for this because we were struggling through this.

Hamilton said it seemed like it was something that I should have known how to do it, and fortunately they were able to get us some assistance. It caused the meeting to start a little late.

But my question or observation is to Hamilton: Is there a way of updating the instructions? If you're tech savvy, that's great. But we have to assume the general population may struggle with some of this. And even the captionist had difficulty. They had to contact other people. So to improve the -- to make it more user friendly, to improve the user just being able to take advantage of it, can the instructions or as far as how to connect, maybe take another look at it, maybe through the eyes of someone who is not just totally immersed in technology. I think that would be a great help.

TRAVIS: In response to that question, I'm very happy to have some feedback on the FAQs. And the focus groups are exactly to that end, Steve, to have us get to a place where we can feel like our services are improving for folks. So I do want to recognize that when we instruct the captions to be set up as such, you will have to click on the "live transcript," and then you'll run the risk of those overlapping each other. So once we assign the captions, you're off to the races. I would just say don't click on the "live transcript" because that will be duplicative and you'll have them running in tandem, both of them. So you don't want that condition to be sure.

Hamilton, we would love to invite your comment if you have anything to add at this stage.

Welcome, Melissa. Happy to have your comment. And I will go off camera.

MELISSA: Hi, this is Melissa. Thank you so much for your feedback, Steve.

As Travis mentioned, that is part of the reason for the RCC focus groups, and we will certainly be happy to take a look at our FAQs and update those. As a matter of fact, I would be happy to meet with you and Travis if you've got ideas already that you've jotted down based on your initial experience, and I would love to understand more about that so we can make our frequently asked questions more user friendly.

So again, I do appreciate that feedback.

TRAVIS: This is Travis. Thank you, Melissa, for your comments. I appreciate that.

And just to repeat and clarify, the focus group that you commented on, that's a perfect comment to put in the focus group survey response, because that's exactly what we want. We want your experiences, your frustrations, the challenges you've seen, as well as your successes. That's information we're going to take and curate to improve everybody's experience with the service. That's the goal.

Any additional questions as it relates to RCC?

AL: Yes very happy to have those focus groups held. Quite often those are the key to get external people's feedback and actual lived experiences into our thought processes. When I had been the director of a Deaf services organization in voc rehab at a particular program in Massachusetts, I was signing letters. And on one occasion the Commissioner happened to drop by my office to show me a letter which I had signed. And he said, "Did you read this carefully, Al?" And I said "I did, sir. I read through everything and thought it was fine."

He said "Please reread this." I did so two or three times through and didn't see anything wrong. And I found that what had happened was, my secretary called me the director of death services. Right in front of my eyes, there it was. I had proof read it, I thought it was fine! Can you imagine? That letter had widespread distribution. Honestly. I was the director of death services. It's important to have outside eyes in a consultation roll to be sure.

Let's move on to the equipment portion. Here's a question. How do the numbers look for January-March of 2021 relative to the same period of last year? 59 this year. What kind of comparison can we make historically from last year? We would love to hear that report since we don't have the numbers from last year in front of us to compare. So we would love to hear that from you, Kevin.

KEVIN: Yes. There are a variety of reasons. But the number of new equipment applications and new equipment replacement, replacing older broken pieces of equipment that were not under warranty. So those numbers have gone up and down. That's why you see some of those numbers. Some are higher, some are lower, depending on the year.

AL: I believe, Kevin, that question should have been for the current year and the prior year as I saw it in the chat, so we have something to compare them against. Whether or not we are trending upward or in any given direction.

KEVIN: So compared to the last meeting last year, yeah, I could do that. I can share a comparison at the next meeting.

AL: Yes. I would love to see some kind of charted history, if we can see a trend line going in any particular direction or in any particular pattern. That would be lovely to identify and share with computer resources at our disposal. We could certainly do something like that.

I'll wait for the interpreters to swap. One moment.

So the MAT program -- this is still Al speaking. Jason is popping up on camera.

JASON: I would like to know if there's a break planned.

AL: Yes, we'll be taking a break after our question period. We do have a break scheduled, Jason.

ALEX: This is Alex. If I could jump in. My apologies for interrupting. Before Kevin moves on to other things, I do have a suggestion about charting, looking at last year's numbers and statistics versus this year's. I would keep the current chart and then maybe have a different color bar for comparison for the previous year. So that's a good way to do it on a bar graph.

KEVIN: So you would like to see a bar chart. Noted. Thank you.

AL: This is Al speaking. Now, the MAT application form is the next thing I would like to talk about. And the question is, what kinds of revisions did you make to that form, Kevin?

KEVIN: Let me look at this. First off, we added this red line on the front page, the red text. This is for emphasis, to make sure people include this information, because a lot of people had been skipping this portion. So hopefully this helps.

AL: I wasn't able to see which were redlined. Can you indicate that?

KEVIN: So they're no longer in black. They are in red right here. That was for emphasis, that hopefully people will look at that and make sure to fill that out. Because it is a requirement. So hopefully this helps.

Also the agreement, the acceptance agreement. You have to read this and understand that you are accepting responsibility to take care of the equipment. Before, it was pretty difficult to read. So we made the font a little bit larger in hopes that it will be clearer. It is quite a bit of information there, but we stretch it out as much as possible so it was a little bit more readable. And of course licensed professionals, the board had approved of getting rid of the license number -- no, no, no, sorry. I'm wrong. The state of Maryland only, it was that revision. Other states like West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, we got rid of some of those. So anybody who lives near the border was stuck because it said it was Maryland only. So we adjusted that part.

So the client is actually responsible to stamp the application and send that in previously, but now it comes with a prepaid postage. Hopefully that will incentivize people to submit their applications.

There was another additional edit. We have a couple of these postage printouts available. It's a disability certification form. So any licensed professional can use this to mail it in to us as well. So there are two of those.

Oh, and of course the 800 number, I think we updated that and added a new VP number, a video phone number. So I think those were the main edits.

AL: Thank you, Kevin, for that excellent clarification.

Moving on, the Maryland Relay website is the next thing we would like to talk about and who is responsible for that website. What, if any, are the key updates or changes that have been made? Who is the individual, the steward responsible for the website?

TRAVIS: I believe Donna already spoke to that in her report on her first slide. She can certainly clarify that now.

DONNA: Yes. So how is everybody doing? This is Donna. So the question was what are the key changes to the website that are being made?

So one of the things that we're doing -- so we have two websites that are being updated. So we're still hosted on a DoIT platform at the moment. And we were given an opportunity to update the website. So we figured while we had that website, we would make the most out of it and make changes. So we are adding a page on RCC, we are adding a calendar, we are adding changes to the Relay Partner training. Let me pull it up in my email. Give me a moment. Okay. So one of the things that we are adding, MAT is going to have its own page. So it's going to be DoD/maryland.gov/MAT. We're adding anything about RCC, we're adding information on RTT. As I said, we're going to expand the MAT program. And that's pretty much what we're doing for the DoIT page.

And then DoD, when that is switched over, we're pretty much changing the look of that. We're going to add video capabilities, we're going to have it be more interactive. People are going to be able to download the MAT application, they'll be able to fill it out, they'll be able to upload it. So those are some of the main changes we are making to the website.

The webmaster for DoD told us to pretty much ask for whatever we want, let them tell us no. So that is what we're doing. And hopefully by our next meeting in July we'll have more of a comprehensive website, I mean website and update. The process has been a little bit slow because, A, it is the state of Maryland, and, B, with COVID and a lot of other things going on, like we started this process, it kind of got put on the back burner, but now it's being picked up again. So we will have more of an update next time.

TRAVIS: All right. This is Travis. I actually have a question from the audience, from Brenda, who has a question for Kevin.

So individuals with visual challenges, are they able to read the small text on the application? Have you considered those in the low vision community, those in the visually challenged community?

KEVIN: Hey, Brenda. Yes, that is an excellent question. In my report, I did make mention that we would be having separate applications, in Braille, in large print, in Spanish language, etc. So yes, there will be deafblind or hearing blind folks who have access to those.

Question from Jason Corning.

JASON: I'll just add one more. Not all deafblind folks have access to Braille or understand a variety of language, as well as sign language. So that might be helpful.

KEVIN: That's an excellent point, Jason. I'm going to make note of that right now.

AL: This is Al speaking. One final question. In terms of customer care, what kind of email contacts came through? What were the top issues that you saw in terms of customer care? Do you have any motion of the kinds of concerns categorically that you were presented with?

TRAVIS: Bear with me one second.

All right. This is Travis. I would actually like to call on Melissa for this one, if she wouldn't mind giving some of her observations as it relates to customer care. And I'll stay on screen with Melissa to add any additional thoughts. I mean, I can certainly start with some of my observations and then turn it over to Melissa.

What we've noticed up until this point, specifically as it relates to CTS, is very frequently we're getting complaints about the phones, the devices themselves not working anymore. And upon doing our due diligence, oftentimes the issue is they have been upgraded from an analogue to digital line, so we have to instruct them how to move to the other port within their phone. Typically it's as simple as changing to the IP-based port in their phone in order to get their device to work again.

We actually just released a survey several weeks ago, part 1, and then again part 2, for all the MAT clients, just to get some data and some feedback about their experience with their caption phones as well as other equipment but specifically their caption phones. And that's pretty much what comes to mind when it comes to customer experience and complaints.

Melissa, if you want to add to that.

MELISSA: Hi, this is Melissa. Again, thank you for the question.

So as far as email, there is an option to email customer care, and that email address is mdrelay@hamiltonrelay.com.

We also have an option for live chat. So consumers can click on the live chat button and they can have an instant message conversation with our customer care team.

And then to address your question regarding what are the calls that we receive, looking at the reports and speaking with the customer care team, lately we've seen an increase in RCC inquiries. We often receive MAT inquiries, in which case we refer the customer to Kevin and his team. And we get a lot of general inquiries about how to make a relay call in addition to Travis' response to caption telephone. Sometimes people don't realize that their phone provider has upgraded their equipment from analogue to digital, so suddenly their caption telephone device isn't working and we're able to work through those issues with those customers as well.

I hope that addresses your question.

TRAVIS: Thank you, Melissa. This is Travis. I would just like to add one more thing. As it relates to the data with the caption phones and we mentioned the number steadily going down. I think in December we were at 98 users and now we're at 88 users, only 88 Maryland users are utilizing their caption phones. We're trying to figure out if that is due that analogue to digital switch or what other factors are contributing to that. So that was the impetus for sending out the survey, and the data we will send to the FCC, to figure out how to address this issue. The FCC was taken aback. They didn't realize there was a problem. And we need to have a really strong data set in order to justify what we think are the reasons so that the FCC will look into that further.

Al?

AL: Thank you for that. I'll invite any further questions from anyone else on this topic.

Seeing none, it is now time for that scheduled break. If there are no objections, we'll have a 10-minute break. We will come back at 5 minutes after the hour. Are there any objections to that?

DARRIN: No objections. This is Darrin. I'm good for a break.

AL: Seeing none, I call a 10-minute break at this time. We'll see you all then.

[Break] .

TRAVIS: Al, if you're ready to proceed.

AL: I am indeed. This is Al speaking.

At this stage, after we have completed the reports, I don't think there are any further reports, which I would be happy to invite if there were, if there are any staff reports remaining at this stage?

TRAVIS: None from TAM.

AL: All right. In which case, let's go ahead and review the minutes from our former meeting. If there are any suggested revisions or edits, or if people feel like the minutes should stand.

DARRIN: I will make a motion to approve the minutes.

AL: Do we have a second, please?

STEVE: This is Steve. I will second.

ALEX: Alex is also seconding.

AL: I saw Alex first, so I'll take his second.

If there are no objections to that, the minutes for the previous meeting have been entered as they stand. That motion carries.

TRAVIS: This is Travis. We do have our Hamilton outreach team reports next. Our TAM reports have been concluded, but we have our three outreach coordinators' reports.

AL: Fair enough. We can hold off on any further business, and we will now invite Hamilton on screen to give those reports.

REBECCA: Hi, I'm Rebecca Miller. I'm the real-time text outreach coordinator. I have a lot of updates that are super exciting that we've done over the past couple of months. We had 50 events, including exhibits, meetings with organizations, networking meetings. We had 10 virtual presentations. And we had 3 sponsorships. So even in this virtual world, we are still making huge strides with outreach, doing a lot of exciting things.

If there is anything that you guys think that we could collaborate with you on for outreach, we are always available for that and more than excited to help.

Now I will pass it to Jenny, who will give you more of our outreach highlights.

JENNY: Thanks, Rebecca.

Hi, everybody, I'm Jenny Pearson, the caption telephone outreach coordinator. For those of you who are new and don't know me, welcome to the board.

We have three really great announcements that we were able to pull off, if you will, in this virtual world in the last 3 months. Firstly, for those of you who live in the Frederick area, you may have seen this. But we had a featured article in the Fred ring News Post's prime time senior living magazine. It was wonderful, well written, and I was excited to participate in that interview. We had a number of calls from folks in the Frederick area who are interested in captioned telephone services through Maryland Relay, so I felt like that was a really big success.

Second, Tarita was able to work with Miss Lynch, with the Public Service Commission of Maryland. 53 employees were able to participate in this meeting, and Tarita feels like it was a huge success.

INTERPRETER: How many employees participated?

JENNY: 53.

And Rebecca was able to present to the emergency communications subcommittee, which includes the leadership for every PSAP or public safety access point in the state. The information was about RTT, and it was very well developed. And they're excited to learn more from Rebecca in the future.

Right now I'm going to turn it over to Tarita, who will talk about some calls to action for you.

Tarita?

TARITA: Good morning, everyone! This is Tarita Turner. And so just to continue on the amazing things that the outreach team has been able to do, we participated in B'More Healthy, an expo that Baltimore City has every year. And this year of course it was virtual, like everything else in the world has been. And we will still be featured on Fox 45, CW, My TV Baltimore through April. So keep an eye out for the Maryland Relay team. So this was myself, Rebecca, Jenny, and Donna, all four of us were able to be interviewed. So it was spectacular. Please stay on the lookout for that.

Hamilton also has three opportunities every single year to celebrate this community, to celebrate members of the Deaf, hard of hearing, and speech to speech disabled community. Actually, Mickey, Dr. Morales, who is now a board member, won the DAW award, the Deaf awareness award. So happy to have her on board. But right now we are focusing on the Better Hearing and Speech Month award. The deadline was actually April 9th, but we've extended it because we really want to be able to, again, celebrate someone here in Maryland, and this could be someone who is hard of hearing or has a speaking difficulty. And again, we love to celebrate those champions of change. So people who are really doing amazing work in the community, in the state of Maryland. And the contact person is going to be Jenny. Jennifer Pearson. So her contact information and actually all of our contact information is in the chat. I'm going to put it on Facebook as well. But if you know anyone that you just think, man, this person is phenomenal, if they are hard of hearing or they have a speaking difficulty, please nominate them for Better Hearing and Speech Month.

Thank you guys so much, and I hope you guys have a great rest of the meeting.

AL: All right. Thank you very much indeed.

Are there any questions with respect to the Hamilton program?

Seeing none, let's proceed to hearing from members of the board.

I personally have nothing to report, but I will invite other board members to make their respective reports.

I recognize Darrin.

DARRIN: This is Darrin. I do have a report to make.

AL: Go right ahead, Darrin. Although let me check right quick if we have a running order and consult the agenda. All right. Yes, Darrin, you may go.

DARRIN: Okay. So this is Darrin. Yesterday we had our MCOD, the Maryland Commission on Disabilities meeting. So that was hosted yesterday. I wanted to give you an update on the COVID-19 pandemic and our progress within the state.

We met with two senior officials, the section chief Steve Chuh, and then the director of operations for the Department of Human Services, Beth Brown. There was a lot of information that was discussed at the meeting. Give me a second to get my thoughts together.

So just some updates. They explained accommodations and accessibility as it relates to the Deaf, deafblind community, so forth and so on. There is VRI currently in place, and in addition to that, they're utilizing tablets at all of the mass vaccination sites to access that VRI. All of the state mass vaccination sites are providing that. So they have iPads with VRI in place for any Deaf and hard of hearing individual that goes to get vaccinated.

Now, the smaller, more local vaccination sites, at local pharmacies and things of that nature, there was discussion about accessibility in those cases. They're going to be looking into that a little bit more.

In addition to that, people talked about, as everybody knows and is familiar with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, that has been suspended. It is no longer being distributed to any of the state mass vaccination sites currently.

I did during the course of the meeting ask a question as it pertains to Memorial Day weekend, because that is fastly approaching, and would there be the potential of another spike or surge based on that weekend.

Steve's response was more than likely yes, however, they're going to continue to monitor the situation very closely because, as we know, that's a very popular destination weekend for vacations, so forth and so on.

As of right now we are in an overall about 50% positive rate. So three working very closely with the CDC to try to figure out where the norm levels are with the national average, where we fall as it aligns to that. So that's all the updates from yesterday's MCOD meeting.

AL: Any responses to Darrin's report? Any questions? This is Al.

Any other board member reports or words or updates?

All right. I think that concludes our reports. I think we'll take public input now. I prefer the input before the new business that we need to do. Do we have any comments from the public?

TRAVIS: No additional public input so far. This is Travis. I'm monitoring.

AL: All right. Fair enough. If there is none, then let's go ahead and open new business. We could have a formal question in the matter of an incoming Vice Chair election, because of course yes in the appointment process with the government. I am no longer acting Chair of this body, so you have to certainly put up with me on the long term now. Apologies for that.

Moving on to the election of the Vice Chair. Do I hear any nominations? Any nominations for the election of Vice Chair, ladies and gentlemen?

One moment, Jason. Let's recognize Jason, and Alex, we'll have you wait, if you wouldn't mind popping your camera off.

JASON: I was just wondering for Vice Chair, the nomination process, what are the requirements for that position? Could you explain?

AL: You would back me up in the event of any illness or incapacity. You would back me up in chairing and running the meetings, Jason.

DARRIN: This is Darrin. I have a question.

AL: I'm sorry, Darrin. I promised Alex would get the next comment.

DARRIN: Okay. I just had a question about the nomination process. Could a person nominate themselves? Just wanted some clarification there.

AL: Yes, yes, if you had a comment on this, I would love to hear it.

Yes, Alex, go ahead.

ALEX: Yes. I would like to nominate Darrin Smith for the position of Vice Chair.

AL: Duly noted. We now have one individual standing for the position of Vice Chair.

Darrin, do you accept Alex's nomination?

DARRIN: This is Darrin. I do.

AL: Are you seconding the nomination for yourself or are you also nominating?

DARRIN: I accept the nomination. Thank you.

AL: Fair enough.

Are there any other nominations for the position of Vice Chair on the table?

I saw you pop up, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE: I was just going to second the nomination for Darrin.

AL: All right. Thank you, Deirdre. We would ask that you wait for the interpreter to pop up before speaking, but we've taken care of that for the present.

Going once, going twice, any other nominations for Vice Chair? Three, four, and five. Nominations are closed.

Are there any objections to Darrin Smith assuming the position of Vice Chair? If there are none, we'll have that motion pass.

I don't see any objections. I'll give a count of five. Going once, twice, three times. Four, and five.

Congratulations, Darrin Smith. You are now my back up.

DARRIN: Thank you, everyone. Thank you, board. I appreciate it.

AL: Outstanding. This is Al speaking. Let's move on, then, to new business. I'll entertain a motion or discussion or if anyone has an idea to proffer for new business at this time, I'll open the floor.

After our interpreter switch, I'll give it to the count of five. Going once, twice, three times, four, and five.

The new business portion of our meeting is closed.

I'll invite any announcements at this stage.

INTERPRETER: Travis, could you please spotlight the on deck Deaf interpreter?

Thank you.

AL: Shall I repeat the last comment?

INTERPRETER: If you wouldn't mind, thank you.

AL: Absolutely.

I'll call for any further new business. Seeing none, I'll give it a count of five. One, two, three, four, and five. New business is now closed.

May I ask David Bahar if I haven't overlooked anything? You had mentioned a possible retreat. Did you cover that? Did I miss that?

DAVID: I haven't yet, no. This is David.

AL: Shall we bring it up now?

DAVID: Okay. Sure.

I'll take this opportunity on this part of the agenda to announce to everybody here that my staff, as well as Al and everybody, discussed an idea of a retreat for GABTR members. The purpose of this would be similar to like an orientation. We would be reviewing the expectations of the board members, we would be reviewing GABTR bylaws, as well as the Code of Maryland Regulations, talk about TAM, Maryland Relay, the MAT program, GABTR itself, its roles and responsibilities and function.

So I think one session perhaps for this retreat. Individuals from the University of Maryland school of public policy and leadership will have other board leaders in Maryland who may be invited to be included. So look out for an email that I will be sending out for possible dates and options. We will hopefully set up something for that retreat. And hopefully we'll have more information for you. And this is all because we have a lot of new membership, so it's a perfect opportunity to do something like to with the board.

AL: Chair recognizes Steve Cooper. Take it away.

STEVE: Thanks, this is Steve. I had a question for David as to the intention of the retreat. Is it to be in person? Strictly virtual? Or hybrid? And also I'm curious -- well, let's leave it at that.

DAVID: Sure, this is David. I can answer that.

At this point we don't foresee hosting any type of retreat in person. So it would be a virtual event. We don't want to have to postpone it indefinitely until we are allowed to come back together in person, which could be, to be completely honest, more than the next quarter. We would like to do this prior to our summer GABTR meeting, so it would be virtual.

STEVE: This is Steve here. Thank you. You picked up on my concerns in that answer as well. Thank you.

DAVID: Absolutely. Thank you.

AL: This is Al speaking. All right. If there are no further announcements or comments, then I suppose... yes, Travis?

TRAVIS: We do, actually.

AL: Travis has got something for us.

TRAVIS: This is Travis. I want to remind everyone that we are going to be hosting that RCC panel discussion this upcoming Tuesday, April 20, from 3:00-4:00 p.m. I will be sending out the invitation again. I have sent it once but I will do it one more time. I hope you're able to attend that. It's really significant. You'll be able to see what some other states are doing to see how we might better serve as a role model for RCC services. Looking forward to seeing you all there.

AL: Does that mean that all of the board members are expected to be on such a panel?

TRAVIS: No, no, no. We only have five people on the panel. The different states, the relay administrators that I mentioned from Maine, Wyoming, Colorado, and Montana, if I remember correctly. And then the fifth person would be myself, and I'll be functioning as moderator and share something comments as well from Maryland's perspective.

AL: Will that be public so people can tune in?

TRAVIS: It will be completely open to the public, yes.

AL: So there's an open invitation to board members.

TRAVIS: Yes. We're expecting over 200 attendees. We've invited a lot of people. So absolutely. There have been some formal invites for example, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Lieutenant Governor, TEDPA, NASRA representatives, Deaf in Government, DIG. Lots of individuals.

AL: All right. So GABTR would count among those invitees as well. Thank you, Travis. Thank you very much indeed.

Are there any further announcements at this stage? I'll open the floor. Going once, going twice, three times, four, and five.

Announcement period has closed. We will meet again in three months' time. Well, in a perfect world it would be in person, but I think it's far too soon to jump that gun. I think we'll have at least one more virtual meeting via the Zoom platform in three months' time.

And if there are no objections, we will adjourn this session of GABTR at this stage. Going once, twice, three times, four, and five.

We are adjourned, ladies and gentlemen. We'll see new three months. Do stay well. Keep yourself safe. And avoid guns.