UNEDITED REALTIME TRANSCRIPT

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

**Board Meeting**

Held via

Zoom

January 14, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

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

**Board Meeting**

**January 14, 2022**

**GABTR BOARD MEMBERS:**

Alfred Sonnenstrahl, Acting Chair

Steve Cooper

Allysa Dittmar

Betty Dodds

Glenn Lockhart

Deirdre Lynch

Lori Markland

Shannon Minnick

Ken Putkovich

Alex Simmons

Darrin Smith

**HAMILTON STAFF:**

Melissa McMahan

Rebecca Miller

Jenny Pearson

**TAM STAFF:**

David Bahar, Director

John Brennan

Donna Broadway-Callaman

Travis Dougherty

Jane Hager

Leslie Hannibal

Kevin Steffy

Tarita Turner

**HEARING INTERPRETERS:**

Anne Leahy

Anna Rose

Chante Wilson

**CAPTIONER:**

Natalie Ennis

**GABTR Meeting**

**January 14, 2022**

**9:00 a.m.**

DARRIN: Hello. Good morning, everyone. Al will be joining a little bit later this morning, so I will begin today's meeting. We're going to get started with roll call. Looks like we have a larger number than usual. I will say your name. Please bring your screen up at that time and indicate your presence.

Glenn?

GLENN: Hi there.

DARRIN: Michelle Morales?

Allysa Dittmar?

ALLYSA: Good morning.

DARRIN: Alex Simmons?

ALEX: Good morning, Darrin.

DARRIN: Ken Putkovich?

Steve Cooper?

STEVE: Good morning.

DARRIN: Lori?

LORI: Good morning.

DARRIN: Good morning.

Shannon Minnick?

Al Sonnenstrahl? He of course let us know he would be a little bit late.

Deirdre Lynch?

Al, Allysa, Alex, Steve, myself, Lori. So it looks like... hold on. Let me do some real quick math.

Currently I am under the impression that we do not satisfy quorum. Therefore, we cannot bring any motions or official business to the meeting. Once quorum is met, we will allow the agency and the Director to continue with their reports.

Tarita?

TARITA: Hi, this is Tarita speaking. I'm on the phone with Betty and Ken. I just sent them the link. They did not have it. So they should be joining shortly.

DARRIN: Fantastic. Thank you so much. Appreciate that update.

Okay. Once they arrive, we will get started.

With that being said, I will turn the floor over to David from TAM to give his report.

DAVID: All right. I guess we can go ahead and get started with my report.

KEN: We got the link.

BETTY: You're on. I can hear you through Zoom. Just mute yourself.

KEN: Okay. Thank you, Tarita.

TARITA: You're welcome. Bye bye.

KEN: Shall we retire to the Zoom room?

DAVID: All right, we just want to make sure everybody is muted before we proceed. (Background noises).

All right. Thank you. I am David Bahar with Telecommunications Access Maryland. We will begin this meeting with my report.

I would like to introduce you to our newest deafblind specialist, Eddie Martinez, but unfortunately, just after he joined us, he took another position elsewhere and left us. So currently our deafblind specialist position is vacant. As always, if you know of any individual who you feel might be a good fit for that position, please reach out to us and let us know. It is not a PIN position so you do not have to go through the same tedious interview process as a regular PIN state employee would. At this point, we would just like names of qualified people and we can follow up from there. So thank you for that.

Next slide, please.

You might have noticed a few available positions on our roster. The deafblind community representative, who has left and moved to another state. We are currently searching for a replacement.

In addition to that, the Maryland Commission on Disabilities --

KEN: You need to get captioning --

DAVID: Which is an advisory council for the Department of Disabilities. Our member also there left. So we need a replacement for that position.

And thirdly, the Governor's Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. That may be an old slide. My understanding is Kate Breen is the new representative for our council.

With the pandemic, we have been 100% virtual. It's been very difficult to do anything in person. We did have one anniversary event that was in person, which was very nice, but overall we haven't been coming together like we did previously. It's been a huge change for us.

Now we are in the process of setting ourselves up for success when it comes to what looks like will be a semi-permanent virtual environment. When it comes to evaluations and trainings and workshops and the board meetings and the like. We felt we needed to set ourselves up better to provide accessibility and full participation in those. So we are in the process of installing a studio in our current conference room. For those of you familiar with our conference room's layout, before we had chairs and typical audience seating and presentations in the front, which isn't really conducive to a COVID environment. So what we've done is we've reduced the number of chairs. The focus is now more on the presentation space with a screen, videocameras, and so forth. That will allow us to operate in a hybrid model.

We have some individuals who will be in the room, for example doing the presentations, while the majority of the audience will be able to participate virtually. That's our hope for that space.

Our goal in terms of target date we're not too sure about yet. We're in the process of acquiring the very final pieces of equipment for that studio. The bulk of the equipment has already been purchased and installed. The lighting, the cameras, the tripods, the televisions, the computers, and so forth. There is one mission critical piece that we are still in the process every procuring, and once that's done and installed, we will be able to operate in that hybrid model.

Any questions to than before we proceed?

Let me look at the chat. Lori, in terms of position descriptions, not yet. But Kevin, if you could forward the job description, maybe you could share that with Lori and she could pass that on. So thank you so much.

At this time I'll turn the floor over to Darrin. Thank you so much, Kevin.

LESLIE: Hello, everyone. Happy New Year.

As you see from this first slide, it's recording our revenue and our expenditures month over month.

Next slide, please.

As you see from this slide, year over year our revenue has decreased, while our expenditures -- our revenue decreased and our expenditures increased year over year. So currently we have $12,465,782 in our revenue account.

Next slide, please.

Now this slide is a projection of what our revenue balance will be like going through the year, fiscal year '27. As you see from the chart, our revenue will continue to decrease even though at the current pace our expenditures are flat, but our expenditures will continue to increase as the programs that are being implemented incur additional cost. So we're projected to have a revenue balance by 2027 of $1 million. That does not take into account the increase in expenditures, because those expenditures as a projection are flat right now at 3,441,173. But at the current pace of our programs in meeting the needs of our citizens, those expenditures will increase so we have to look for measures to increase our revenue balances. And Dave and I have been talking about being able to go and get increased revenue from the state legislature.

That's it for my report. Any questions?

STEVE: Hi, everyone. I have a question. Sorry. This is Steve Cooper. That's quite concerning, in 5 years we will basically run out of money. Have you identified why the annual revenue is decreasing so drastically?

LESLIE: Well, we have implemented some additional programs within TAM, and therefore the expenditures have increased.

David, you want to add in to that?

STEVE: Yes, but you're saying the revenue, the income is decreasing.

LESLIE: Well, that's just a projection. It doesn't take into account the annual transfers that will be occurring during those periods. At the current pace, we're receiving about $4 million a year in additional transfers. That does not take into account fully all those additional transfers that will be coming in. But as a projection, we project that the revenue balance will decrease down by the fiscal year 27.

STEVE: That's without the $4 million a year?

LESLIE: Yes.

STEVE: Okay.

LESLIE: But you also have to take in consideration our expenditures currently are about $4 million a year, $5 million a year, and that has increased over the past 2 years about 1.5 million. So you anticipate, if we're receiving 4 million and spending about 5 million, the revenue balance is going to continue to decrease over the course of time. So we have to look at ways of getting additional revenues so we can continue to meet the needs of our citizens.

STEVE: Thank you.

DAVID: And if I can jump in briefly. I would also like to give more of an overview and big picture explanation of what's happening in terms of our funding, just for clarification, Steve. Our source of funding does not come from legislative action. It's not a line item on the state's budget every year. Really and truly, how we earn our revenue is based on statute where we collect a surcharge of 5 cents that's on all bills for any type of communication service within the state of Maryland. So that essentially means landline telephones, cell phones, VoIP, and the like. Any communications account has that 5-cent surcharge added to it, and that goes directly to The Universal Services Trust Fund, the USTF, here in the state of Maryland. That is our source of revenue and funding.

Now, in the past, that surcharge was higher than 5 cents. I think at one point it was maybe 17 cents or 14 cents. And it has over the years decreased, and the reason being because the balance of the USTF was growing exponentially, so the auditors essentially said we had to make adjustments to that surcharge because we have to follow the statute that essentially says the USTF will have a set amount to fund our operations annually. So if it grows exponentially to an area of surplus, we need to cut the rate to reduce that surplus. And that's how the rate ended up landing at 5 cents which is where it is now. We have been even for the last few years and our USTF account has been stable.

However, we have had several different services and programs with a price point attached to them. The Senior Call Check program, SCC, I believe its first year of operations was 2019. That had a significant impact on our budget. I believe last year was about 400,000 in total, I believe.

LESLIE: Yes.

DAVID: Annually, that adds up.

In addition to that, we have the new relay contract. The old Maryland Relay contract had a per minute rate, which the current contract rate is almost double that per minute rate from the previous contract. So all these things add up.

At the same time, some of our minutes for each of our relay services are declining. So that impacts us with the addition of two new relay services, RTT, which really is not up and running yet, but our RCC minutes are at about 10,000 per month I think this past month, and that also is expensive.

We have to look at other things as well. Our deafblind communications facilitator program has an impact, and so forth. But these increased programs with price points attached to them impact our bottom line.

We also know at some point, based on current projections, it could be 2-3 years out, we are going to have to ask the PSC to look at our USTF fee and possibly raise it to 6 or 7 cents.

I hope that gives you a better understanding, Steve, of those budgetary items.

STEVE: Just one short question. All funding for Maryland Relay comes out of the USTF? Salaries, rent? Is it fairly revenue neutral to the state?

DAVID: It's considered a special fund, and it is 100% from the USTF, yes. I mean, you want to consider it separate from the general fund. It's outside of the Maryland general fund.

STEVE: Okay. So you currently coming to the state, it would not be like asking for an increase; it would merely be asking to support the program. Okay. Thank you for the clarification, David.

DAVID: Sure, my pleasure.

LESLIE: Any additional questions?

Okay. I'm done. Have a good day, everyone.

DARRIN: Leslie and David, you mentioned the deafblind program. What is the vision, if I may, for the budgetary outlay and what we're setting aside? Is that 200K? 300K? 1 million? At what level will the CA program be booked on the ledger? What are the expenditures that we might expect to see year over year for CF?

DAVID: Leslie, correct me if I'm wrong, but if I remember correctly, it was 65K for 2022?

LESLIE: Yes. In FY22 it was about 65K. I believe this year it may have increased to be about 100K. Those are the outlays.

DAVID: Hi, Al.

AL: Hello. I guess you don't need me at the moment. I can pop off.

DAVID: I hope that answers your question, Darrin.

DARRIN: It does indeed. Thank you.

Al is present, so I'll allow him to take over convening as the Chair for this session.

AL: One moment. Bit of logistics from the Chair.

TRAVIS: Is there anything we can do for you? Are you okay? I can go ahead and start my section.

Very good morning to everyone and Happy New Year as well.

There's a whole lot we can talk about today. We need your guidance as our board, and we will let you know those kinds of questions that we have as we go through our materials for you.

Come last December, we had our 30th anniversary of the first relay call in the state. We had a big event to celebrate that moment. There were some donations of old TTY equipment. And we set up a museum area to display those items. It was really pretty cool. Lots of people came in. Staff folks were there, board folks were there. And there's a picture of the event that we have here on the PowerPoint. You see the first year and the 30th year.

Sam Jones had two older TTYs that he wanted to donate, '90s era. We've gotten many donations over that time period, but we told him to go ahead and bring them in. He said, I can't lift them. We said, really? You can't lift them? That is definitely not a '90s TTY, then. And sure enough, they were much older. I would say they came from many decades earlier, '50s-ish. But we are very grateful for that. We put them in the museum area. This equipment is well preserved. On the printout, it still says "This is Sam Jones, GA." We wanted to keep that for posterity. We were able to identify the manufacturers, the models, and we have there wonderful historical information. Also for television captioning and all the rest. We have a lot of historical equipment that we want to preserve. And staff and board were there who remember the days in those first relay moments of the '90s. So we're very happy to have that.

Also we had a holiday party on December 17th, I want to say. And here's an image from that holiday party. Lots of folks came and were able to see us. We had an ODHH/TAM combined holiday party. We wanted to recognize that here with this picture. We had a good number of people come in, meet and greet and talk to us. It was a great event.

Also, just to update folks on NASRA. I become the member at large for the NASRA board come January 1, so I was able to participate in those discussions with that body. And in those discussions, let me talk about what we're going to do for the conference first. And also I wanted to talk about the NASRA TEDPA, which is the equipment distribution corollary to NASRA, we wanted to have a conference around the same time in the same locality so that we could have some more sort of joint overlap discussions. But once again we're going to have to postpone that. If we had full attendees at the hotel for the rate that was quoted, it would probably barely be a break even kind of scenario. And we don't want to go in the red for our conference. So we had a discussion and found that it wasn't worth it to pursue it in person just yet, but we will put it off maybe to the coming year, and we're in negotiations with the facility and all the rest of the arrangements. So it's a disappointment, but we want to err on the side of caution and keep everyone safe.

Also we have a CTS task force. I'm sure I've made mention of that in this session before. Captioned telephone services in terms of analogue service, we have had upwards of seven or eight states now come on board to this task force to talk about the issues at hand. At this stage we're in the mode of gathering data. We have found that folks' complaints about captioned telephones no longer functioning and sort of not understanding why, because they have it all set up as they should with the lines, it turns out that their internet provider will have changed to fiber based. So up to the home, it's fine, but once you get into the home, it's not going to work because the TTY and the CapTel equipment are not going to work with fiber because it's an analogue system. So this is a huge problem, and we need to pull the reins in and make sure that we gather data and speak more with the Federal Communications Commission on this situation and the waning numbers of caption users.

When I started here 2 years ago, there were about 180 average per month. Now we're down to 50. So it's continuing to wane and go on that downward trajectory. We're seeing more and more record of complaints come through because people aren't able to use it. And this is a pattern we see in other states as well per the data that we are gathering that we will ultimately hand over to the Commission and see what the FCC can do about it, if anything, if there are options or solutions at hand, whether or not we just sunset those services for good and relinquish control over to the InnoCaptions and Clear Captions and other companies in the world who work at the national level. So that is where we're at. In terms of solutions and best practices, we are adopting IP CTS for intrastate. Now that we're going to digital, the options are changing, so we need to have the requisite discussions around that. So that's what NASRA has been up to.

Okay. The last of our two working groups are doing the final bits of their tasks. We've got a committee who is serving -- I'm serving on both working groups, so I'm doing double duty every week to try to get everything through at the FCC that we need to talk about. And those are -- well, I can pretty much talk about them in summary. So the wire line, the positive things that have come out from that is RTT and the significance of working on that, making sure that the folks who are delaying and getting waivers are finally going to have a hard stop. We're not going to deal with waivers any longer, which will be a huge win once RTT is up and running, which is tremendous news.

We're also learning that in the European community, they have upgraded their RTT standards, or the code upon which they operate. And in the U.S. we really are only allowed to make one to one RTT calls. However, in the European community, they've upgraded the system to allow multiparty calls on RTTs. For example, if there were to be a scenario wherein I fell off a bicycle and was injured in some way, I could call for my mom to come get me, say, and tell her that I was hurt. And my mom would be able to call 911 during that connection, on the very same call. And the 911 party would join this call between myself and my mother and say, my son has hurt himself, etc., and they would find the GPS coordinates and emergency services would come to my aid. So a multiparty scenario allows that, which is tremendous. I see David says in the chat, three-way RTT calls to 911 with an interpreter on the line is also a possibility in that European scenario, yes. They're ahead of us once again. We may end up just adopting the European standard as we have done in the past, but it's a fascinating discussion that we've been able to have with them.

Also videoconferencing capability. We're bringing that in as well with VRS capability, TRS capability, IP CTS, IP relay, gosh, the whole gamut embedded within videoconferencing itself so that everything is working together, all the technologies and services and all the functions are present. We're talking with other videoconferencing vendors, such as Zoom, such as Microsoft Teams, Google, etc. So we are trying to make sure that an API is set in place so that any and all TRS providers can enter those meetings and provide services without difficulty. Just to make sure there is a back door for the TRS to do so without the kind of approval hurdles that might otherwise be necessary. So we are making sure that we recognize all the capabilities, relay services via video, audio, text, and captions as well. So that is happening right now. We're very excited to see how we would put forth recommendations and best practices for this to work. It's going to take a year or two to work out the kinks and finally see within our lifetime this kind of concept will be realized. But it's upon the FCC to of course put forth regulations and put out bids and all the rest. The government works on its own schedule, as you know, so we would allow that process to work its way through.

However, my next slide is where you will see sort of where we're getting ahead of the game. I wanted to give an update on RCC. It has been growing. We have seen a tremendous uptick in the adoption and use of that service. Folks recognize the benefits of RCC in any given number of situations. The guidelines are still changing as new things emerge, and we have had discussions with several stakeholders with respect to accessibility. And we've come to realize that we need to go ahead and pretty much caption any and everything possible within reason, except for with any federal agencies. We're not able to overstep there. But we need to allow people access to really any type of meeting presentation, training, etc., with certain restrictions but yet the ability to have that service and avail if necessary.

Again, this is a gray area. We're not exactly sure where the line is between right and wrong. But going forward, before we get too, too far into it for captioning relay services, of course the federal relay, GSA agreement that has been in place for federal employees to make requests for reasonable accommodations, that could be VRS, VRI, captioning, CART services, that agreement is sunset now come February for good. It is closed off of the GSA schedule and everything goes back to each local agency to take care of for their own employees. And as that transition happens, some agencies will look to state government to provide RCC services. And we maintain that that is not our purview but that it has to go through an approval process. And through mid-October, it was denied that several agencies requested that that be continued. I'm not sure of the exact acronym, but there was a certain service they were trying to initiate for that. And my concern is that in the middle of February when this is shut down completely, a lot of these agencies will have no plans and they will not have the appropriate -- oh, thank you. Darrin is clarifying the acronym I was going for, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, CMS. They will be denying these requests and expecting folks to work it out on their own. But these requests were for internal meetings and trainings that are being denied, which doesn't seem right. But the reasonable accommodations folks will be up in arms and contact us perhaps. So we need to make sure and work those details out for those internal trainings to make sure they know how to use the relay service, given the fact that they don't have the federal relay any longer. CMS made a request 2 days ago that was denied. So that's just top of mind for us. So we need to think good and hard about how the Disability Advisory Council can talk about TRS on VC at the FCC. Also the federal relay kerfuffle. In light of that, we need to work this out. So there's some more pain points there when the federal relay is sunset completely. Many federal employees will decide that they need to continue to use CART services, say. So an RFP would go out, with language in that that says this is for two-way communication, two-way relay communication, but many vendors will not opt to throw their hat in the ring for that because it's not for their -- it's not in their wheelhouse. It's not something that they do. They just do CART, which is one-way communication. Many folks have done so out of the goodness of their heart or with more flexibility, but it's not a norm necessarily that Deaf people would see because there's no real language in contracts or in the previous GSA schedule that would provide ways for Deaf people to participate in meetings in that direction. They would just be unidirectional. So we realize that we need to continue to advocate for that and make sure the correct language is inserted, that the relay will be there as needed and it might be, say, an all-day training where you have CART services but maybe you just want your questions answered. Or maybe it's something that can be one and done easily, or maybe you're in a longer training that you need to be more interactive with. These issues have to be brought to the fore. We need to have some more advocacy to let people make an informed decision, and it might be that TRS on VC will take off. We don't know if we're going to press play right now, but historically, states have kind of been ahead of the national landscape. If you remember the first VRS tests were in the state of Maryland, and we were involved in that. So we were ahead of the game on that as well.

I see that Darrin has his hand up. I can certainly pause if you have a question relevant to this, or if you want some time later.

DARRIN: My question is about TRS within the VC videoconferencing. How does that affect, really two parts. How does that affect Hamilton and how does that affect -- what was the second one? TAM. So what kind of impact will it have in terms of those two entities? TRS within VC I think is a great concept, but I'm just wondering, because if I remember correctly, if memory serves me right, the contract hasn't reflected any language within it to include VC. So how does that impact both of those parties moving forward?

TRAVIS: Right. Let me process my thoughts on that, Darrin. This is Travis speaking. I don't know if I 100% understand the question. I do know that with the advent of VC, the question is whether or not we would be able to use TTY service and provide access in that way?

But I guess from my perspective, in the event that the FCC in some way makes a decision to recognize, say, RCC or videoconferencing as part of the TRS system, then I don't know if states would really have any control over that. It might just be a Commission-level decision, same with the other flavors of services. I don't know if that answers your question.

AL: I would like to clarify. I think what Darrin is insinuated is that, my understanding is there's a lot of confusion out there as we navigate between the state and the FCC and the relationship between the two. Basically where is the line between those two? I think that's the question. In terms of funding, who is responsible for the funding. Is it the state, is it the FCC. For example, IP CTS was mentioned in the conversation. Now, to me IP CTS means it's going through a computer. How, then, would the origin of that call be identified? Would it be identified on the front end or the back end? If we're looking at computers, we're looking at the location of the computer in this case, then, to determine that origin, where the call originated from? Or would it be the caller or the sender? That's one issue, I guess.

You've brought up some fantastic things that are going on in terms of programming, but we're looking at what is the impact of that potential programming I guess on the stateside. As the funding or the revenue or whatever you call it -- I'm having a senior moment; bear with me. Thank you, the USTF funding. What kind of impact will that have on the USTF? Or will this fall totally under the auspice of the FCC and not affect us at all? If I'm understanding Darrin correctly.

DARRIN: You did, Al. I appreciate your clarification.

TRAVIS: Yes, thank you for clarifying that, Al. That's excellent.

I'm hopeful that my perspective, my vision going forward, personally, this is Travis Dougherty speaking, two things will happen. Caption telephone. Firstly, IP CTS will likely be run on the state level, reimbursed by the FCC. And I think it's possible that it will be IP address to IP address. And of course then you could recognize the locality from the state of Maryland. That might prove less usage than normal but could very well be.

Secondly, intra and interstate. I would like to see states certify our residents to be qualified to use CTS services at the state level and confined to the state level. So, you know, we don't want to see hearing parties receive equipment and run up the numbers and line the pockets of vendors in the tens of millions as they have been. That would be my distinct preference.

Secondly, IP CTS or intrastate would be reimbursed on the part of the FCC. That would be my hope. The impact certainly on funding might or might not be as severe, but for TRS or for captioned telephone, for RCC, for example, I feel like the FCC is going to enter that space. I don't know if they'll administer it. My suspicion that that they will, because the variety across states will be too great because remote things are, by their very nature, across different states. And I don't think a given state will want to shell out for that. I think it will have to be at the national level. It's just impossible. Given all the permutations of states that can participate in a call. So I think that will have to be a best practice going forward. We'll have to talk it over, David and myself, with Hamilton and see how we can come to that, with captioned relay, with RCC, and adding the option to maybe have voiceover. If so, then we'll have to schedule an individual who has been trained on how to convert the English text of an ASL user into spoken English, and maybe you could choose four specific conference platforms, Zoom, Teams, etc. The operators would be able to use that and voiceover the typed English of a Deaf party who is a primary ASL user. And it has to be bidirectional. Text has to be read aloud. So I would like to see that kind of service available. How the rates would work out and be structured is anyone's guess. There could be some kind of a padded rate. I don't know how that would ultimately operationalize, but the USTF is certainly going to be used much more, and as these services continue to grow and other analogue services are phased out, we need to look at the health of that fund.

So I would imagine that the service will continue another 2 years under state control, after which I think the FCC will surely usurp it.

Any questions on that?

Seeing none, let's go to the next slide.

Do email me if you have any comments on how to help us navigate these challenges. It would be lovely to see some of your input on that to see how we could do things in the state of Maryland for CRS in general. I would imagine that some folks would have accounts in one platform or another, and once requests start to come through, we want to see an approval process that is streamlined and not have to be kind of all over the board for various services and platforms. That would be my suggestion.

Al?

AL: Quick question. You mentioned that you're on the advisory committee for the FCC?

TRAVIS: I am.

AL: So I'm wondering, has there been any discussion about -- let me figure out how to word this appropriately. I don't know what you call it. But what bothers me essentially about Zoom is when someone is speaking, you see the little indicator up at the top that so and so is talking. I would like to be able to turn that feature off. Now, sometimes I don't connect with audio, and if I do connect with audio and I inadvertently bang on the table or something, it indicates that I'm talking or something along those lines. I then have to worry about any sound or any extraneous environmental noise on my side. It keeps asking me to turn on my audio or unmute myself if I'm speaking. I would like to just be able to set my controls in place and then let it be. Like, for example, if I were to cough, it pops up and says, you are currently muted, please unmute yourself if you would like to speak. Is there a way to set your controls so that those types of things don't happen?

TRAVIS: I understand where you're coming from completely, Al. The relay function is a different use case entirely.

AL: Is there a hotline to Zoom where you could reach out to them directly to ask to change those features? If not, who has the authority to make those requests?

TRAVIS: Sort of. I mean, I have a bit of an inroad and I could try to put that forward.

AL: That feature in particular. To be reminded every time there is a background noise regardless of a person's hearing status is bothersome. Thank you.

TRAVIS: I believe what their intention is, when you go in and have an account, that you be recognized as a relay user, and in so doing, it will automate certain features and functions for you locally. And that's one that could be added to the menu, like if you're not going to use audio and you don't care to have all of those indicators, you could do that.

AL: Thank you.

Any additional questions for Travis?

STEVE: Yes, hi, this is Steve here. One quick question. If they phase out analogue, will that impact our budget as far as having to replace equipment for existing users? Will we need to put in a line item or a projection for our budget for new equipment?

TRAVIS: What new equipment exactly would you be referring to for that?

STEVE: For the end user. For anyone we supply TTY device. If they're old and they're analogue and can no longer use them on the new system, they'll be contacting us and saying, hey, my TTY doesn't work, do I qualify for another unit. So then the state, you know, Maryland Relay would replace that unit for them. And I don't know the numbers, how many are involved. So it might not be significant. But that's really my question. Would it be a significant impact on our budget to have to replace existing hardware to the citizens that are using it?

TRAVIS: I'm just looking at David's comments in the chat about new services being IP based and using things such as tablets, laptops, and smartphones. Right now we're giving that sort of equipment away. We have been historically. So that kind of transition is already afoot. The TTY users are on the wane, and analogue CTS is almost nothing. It's just marginal at best. There might be 2-3 years left for those services, and we will sunset them completely. But the FCC did announce they want to phase out TTYs by 2025 or 2027. The FCC has already made that public announcement, that TTYs will definitely be phased out. I don't know that we're ready for that. RTT isn't up and running yet. That would be the obvious replacement for that. We are asking the FCC and have asked them recently about removing these from their rules as acceptable equivalent access while the gateway to convert RTT through TTY is still kind of underway. We're asking them to remove that because people are milking that rule in the transition, and we want to make sure that the access needs are met first and foremost. But it is a huge monster in this kind of situation that we're dealing with.

I don't know about the relative impact, to be honest. It's a balancing act. We're not paying the TTY minutes, and then that's going to be coming on to our books if it comes into another service. I don't know. Honestly, I wish I could, but I can't really answer that question, Steve.

Darrin, your hand is up. Did you want to pop in?

DARRIN: So my question is how basically is TAM going to handle those complaints about CTS, the analogue conversion and the struggles people are facing. Are they unable to give them any guidance or telling them we're looking into the situation? What exactly has TAM's response been?

DAVID: This is David speaking. I'm wondering whether I can field that one.

TRAVIS: Have at it.

DAVID: All right. It's an interesting thing to call them complaints, but I'm happy to have them. So I don't want to characterize them as such. We've asked for them. We've solicited them.

To back up a bit, what Travis mentioned about folks having confusion about their equipment no longer working that had been operating just fine and maybe what happened in the cutover, we've chatted with the FCC about this for maybe the last 2 years, thereabouts, when COVID started. And there was mention that we had heard of these problems but there was no ability to verify exactly what was happening or substantiate the trend. And so we told them that we were going to work on it and gather data for their benefit.

With the help of Kevin Steffy, Jane Hager, and all the folks who had been working with us in the past, we compiled I believe a randomized list of people who were analogued captioned telephone users. The 84 + model. So we had them answer a series of questions about their captioned telephones and their phone lines and what was analogue and what was not. And we felt as though we got a response rate of over half, some of whom indicated that indeed they had experienced problems from digital to analogue in that conversion. But sadly upon reporting that, some folks passed away, some folks no longer needed it. But in this case I think identifying those trends would have helped that, and these data are in support of patterns in other states that they are experiencing in similar ways.

So in compiling this, we've been working with the task force, let's see, California, North Carolina, what were the other states, Travis?

TRAVIS: Missouri, Pennsylvania... thinking. Colorado and New Mexico.

DAVID: Of course. Right. Okay.

TRAVIS: Well, I guess that about does it. I will be happy to entertain any further questions in wrapping this up.

Our contract for customer service is still instructed on IP lines being a part of the FCC, not something that we would serve any longer. I don't know if we're going to lose that equipment that's out there, if we spent our millions to distribute. But that's what we just need to get out there right now is that CTS is over and done with for all intents and purposes, and it's just waning to the point of being really insignificant.

I'm happy to entertain any questions before turning it over if I'm not mistaken to the next presenter, who is Kevin.

Take it away, Kevin.

KEVIN: Thank you, Travis. Appreciate that.

Hello, everyone. Happy New Year to all of you. I hope everybody had a nice holiday season.

So I'm here to provide everyone with a MAT report.

Next slide, please.

Okay. October to December 2021 represents our last quarter. In that time frame, the MAT program received 49 new applications and we also distributed a total of 82 pieces of equipment. Now, if you compare that to the previous quarter, we received 69 applications during that previous quarter and distributed 69 pieces of equipment. And of course the holidays made an impact on that in terms of applications received, but if you notice, we actually distributed more equipment this past quarter than the quarter before.

Next slide, please.

In the last GABTR report, I mentioned making revisions to our MAT application. We have created a larger font for low vision, a Braille version, and a Spanish translation version. They haven't arrived yet. They should be arriving sometime soon.

We're printing a limited number of those applications based on need, and as we run out, we will order them on an as-needed basis for those three versions of the application.

We are currently developing the ability to E-sign our online application. Up until this point, unfortunately, our online application is limited by the fact that you cannot do an electronic signature. Once it's completed, it has to be sent as an attachment to the MAT specialist. However, then we unfortunately have to send the paper copy for them to get the official signature. So we're hoping that by creating the capacity to do an electronic signature on the application, that will reduce one step, make it less troublesome and more efficient for our clients.

Next slide, please.

As everyone knows, on the Eastern Shore, we have worked with the MAC center. We have also worked with Easter Seals and with IMAGE, serving as our evaluation centers. We have not renewed our contracts with all three of those entities, reason being that we're now working with MDTAP, essentially a sister program to the MAT program, under the auspice of Lori Markland. They deal with their assistive technology loan program. Their goals very much align with ours. We serve very, very similar, oftentimes overlapping populations. So we felt that the need to have separate evaluation centers was a level of redundancy and we're trying to reduce that. So we decided not to renew those specific centers and we're going to be partnering with MDTAP and contracting with the CILs.

That being said, we're only going to be placing MAT equipment in those libraries rather than the 40-50 pieces of equipment that we tip include use in a demonstration capacity. We'll be places limited pieces in those libraries for people to see, which means it will be an added level of responsibility for myself and Jane in doing inventory.

In addition to that, some pieces of equipment have never been used that we don't demonstrate anymore. They're really antiquated in terms of meeting the accessibility needs of different populations, which is a wasted cost as well as taking up valuable real estate. So we're in the process as we do inventory of downsizing some of that equipment.

That doesn't necessarily mean we're going to be doing away with those equipment entirely from the program. If it does meet a consumer's need, we'll certainly be able to provide them with it. But we're just going to be a little bit more frugal in terms of how we utilize our demonstration space.

Lori and myself have already picked one location in Harford County. Actually it's the ARC of Harford County. We've secured a space there. Unfortunately I think at the last report I did comment about DGS, which is the Department of General Services under the state, they have under them an office of real estate which is both new to myself and Lori in terms of navigating all of their requirements contractually and all of their red tape and regulations. The real estate office under DGS has extended our time line considerably. And because of that, the ARC assumed that we weren't interested in that space anymore, and they decided to utilize it for other staff or I'm not sure if they gave it to somebody else.

That being said, they do have another available space that Lori and I might be interested in using since the first one we weren't able to get. We went last Tuesday to take a look at that. We took pictures. Lori wasn't able to come, so I went and took pictures to send to her so she could lay eyes on the space. And we think it's actually better than the previous room that they offered us that we thought we would be able to secure. So we're very, very hopeful that the office of real estate will expedite the process so that we can secure that space so we can use it for evaluation and demo purposes.

Now, Deaf Independent Living Association, DILA, in Salisbury, Maryland, is another potential location we're hoping to utilize. MDTAP has a contract with the CILs called Bay Area CILs, also located in Salisbury. However, the space that they have isn't really going to meet our needs. In addition, we would of course very much like to support a Deaf-centered business like DILA. So we filled out the appropriate request forms and sent it on to the real estate office to hopefully contract with DILA for the space. We're hoping to expedite that process to get that done soon.

There's the possibility of adding another space at the Maryland Deaf Community Center located in Frederick. They have one room that I think we could potentially use for a demo space for our MAT equipment. That being said, the person who operates MDCC reached out and told me they would rather rent it by the hour versus having it be a permanent demonstration space because of course they're able to make more of a profit that way, which we understand.

That being said, we can't be shuttling equipment back and forth to that location. We would like to secure some type of permanent rental agreement for a year. So I've asked some additional questions of them and we found out that MDCC falls under ASLIC, ASL Interpreter Corps, a CODA-owned company. Her name is Marie. So I reached out to her and asked if there is potential for changing things from an hourly to a monthly rental, and she said she would be willing to make an exception in our case. That being said, we haven't had the opportunity to have a meeting yet since the new year. There have been issues of course with COVID and illness and so forth and so on. So that is on hold.

It looks like we might have lost the slide deck, so let me pause for a minute.

TRAVIS: Apparently on the Facebook livestream, it's just showing the PowerPoint. It's not showing you, Kevin. So apparently we need to make some adjustments so that people can see you signing. All they're able to access on the stream is the audio and the PowerPoint.

KEVIN: Okay. Next slide, please.

You might remember we mentioned previously that we were drafting an RFP, request for procurement. We have changed that to an invitation for bid, IFB, that we are currently working on. It's a little bit better in terms of our needs. An IFB has different regulations that it follows, and there's a different set of limitations which will better match what we're looking for.

Now, you see January 6 documented on the slide. That was before I found out that it had been postponed yet again. The reason being, the person who is responsible for the IFB under the procurement department has faced some illness recently. We were supposed to have a meeting this afternoon to set a new date for the release of that IFB. So disregard that January 6th date.

And then to explain it a little bit more, our current contract, our ATE contract, has a total of 11 what we call functional areas. That nomenclature will be changed to "service categories." Currently, there are 11. Under the new IFB, we have added some additional categories to make the grand total 16 service categories. The rationale behind that, the original plan was to keep and just transfer those functional areas over to service categories. However, come to find out when you're utilizing an IFB, it only allows one vendor per service category to win that service category. You can't have more than one vendor serving a specific service category. The previous contract, which was an RFP, which had functional areas, like for example amplified phones being a functional area, you could have three or four vendors successfully win that bid. However, you can only have one per service category in an IFB.

That being said, there are some pieces of equipment, like for example a piece of amplified equipment that is only provided by one specific vendor or another piece of equipment. So we decided to break down the service categories and make them even more specific so that vendors would have a better chance of bidding on a service category where they actually provide that particular piece of equipment, and then they wouldn't be responsible to provide other pieces of equipment that they don't have within their inventory. So that was actually a more strategic way to go about it.

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We have completed all of our Lunch and Learns from last fall. Not what we expected. However, we felt they were relatively successful. In December we had our wrap up meeting of the Lunch and Learn committee to just talk about take aways, lessons learned, how we can improve on the process for the 2022 series. Lots of good ideas were generated. A lot of great feedback. And we're hoping that this year we're able to attract more professionals for our Lunch and Learns based on what we've learned and educate them about the services that we provide within MAT and within relay so that they can then share that with the folks that they serve.

We've decided that Donna will take the lead on the Lunch and Learn series for the upcoming year. And the professionals that we're looking to reach out to for this series you can see listed here on the slide. So various different categories of folks we're hoping to attract.

Okay. So the deafblind specialist position is vacant yet again, as David mentioned. We were sad to see Mr. Martinez go, but we're very happy for the opportunity that he did receive from Gallaudet University where he is currently working. So the position responsibilities, there are two main ones. One, to be the scheduler for our CF communication facilitator program. That person would be responsible for handling any incoming requests for CF services and assigning the appropriate communication facilitator for that job. In addition, they would also function as a MAT evaluator with a deafblind specialty. So they would be working with deafblind or blind individuals. And that means they need to have a functional knowledge of Braille. So if anybody knows of anyone who could satisfy both of those roles, or even if you're not sure but you have a potential name, please reach out and let me know and we'll follow up to see if they're a good fit for our program. Most of the people who were interested are only able to fulfill one of those two roles. So we may need to split the position even further.

We had our first successful CF communication facilitator training on the 21st of November. We hosted it at the Maryland Deaf Community Center, located in Frederick, as I mentioned. We had a fantastic turnout. It was a very nice day. We were there all day. We provided lunch from Mozzeria in D.C. to support the Deaf ecosystem. This group picture here is all of the facilitators as well as the trainers. There are a lot of other folks who aren't in the picture, our volunteers, our deafblind participants who served a role in the mock training portion of the day, as well as eight Certified Deaf Interpreters providing tactile ASL for those deafblind participants. So it was a very good experience. A lot of information was shared. A lot was learned throughout the day.

After the training we got a lot of positive feedback. People want additional follow-up trainings. They would like to learn more specifically about, for example, protactile ASL, which adds that environmental information in addition to regular tactile ASL. And we are hoping to set up a protactile training February 18th and 20th this year. And again, we're planning on hosting that at the Maryland Deaf Community Center.

Next slide, please.

Also very exciting, we fielded our first communication facilitator call on the 17th of December for a deafblind individual in their home. We had two communication facilitators go to provide that service. I actually did join them to take some pictures, because that was a very historic moment for our program, the first call. We wanted to make sure that was documented, just to recognize this historic moment. So I was in charge of that.

The facilitators were able to, as part of that service, provide interpretation of what was happening in the call as well as also what was taking place environmentally. There were two of them, because one did the tactile ASL and one also provided the protactile information which is things like what is the person on the screen doing, what type of body language are they conveying, so on and so forth. So very historic moment that we were happy to recognize.

All right. Does anybody have any questions about what's happening within the MAT program?

AL: Excellent, Kevin. Thank you very much. I'm very excited to hear about the communication facilitator program, and I'm sure that that is very progressive.

KEVIN: Very new, uh-huh.

AL: New to us, new to the world in general.

Could you arrange to have some kind of summary of how that works? I think it's important for the public to be aware of what is happening, and that would go a long way to spread the word. Could you arrange something? Maybe you could talk with a deafblind person and get their take on how their life has been improved by these services? Could you get something like that out there?

KEVIN: Absolutely, that's something we can do. We did have our first client sign a permission to release pictures and videos of that call. But we haven't followed up with her feedback, so certainly we can add that to the story. I can send that on to Donna, and Donna can disseminate that out to the community. Let me make a note to follow up on that. Thank you for the idea, Al.

DARRIN: This is Darrin speaking. My question is, how do you go about screening the communication facilitators, the personnel who provide those tactile services? Is it sort of an open call? Or is there a screening process? What does that look like?

I think it's excellent, but I just have lingering concerns about the personnel and their qualifications, which means they would be vetted in some way to make sure they are up to snuff.

KEVIN: Sure. First we ask the deafblind person if they have a preference of CF. We have a list we provide them and we always defer to their preference. If they second us a request for service for a specific date and time, as I mentioned, we will reach out with their preference. They may give us one or two. Depending on the length of time of the assignment, we may have to send one or two communication facilitators. We of course reach out to their preferred list first. If those people are available, the job is that much easier. However, if maybe one or the other aren't available, we go back to the consumer and let them know and ask if they have a backup or third or fourth choice.

A lot of times it's the newer communication facilitators who don't make those preferred lists because the deafblind folks aren't used to working with them, so we may ask permission to send a more vetted person with a newer individual so they can gain these skills. And they do provide us with feedback on how our CFs can improve. So that's a nice thing. They're growing on the job. That's essentially our vetting process. We go by preference first of the client.

AL: Given the COVID environment, what steps or precautions are being taken to screen and ensure folks' safety?

KEVIN: Absolutely. COVID has been a huge challenge within this program and within the deafblind community specifically. They are of course more sensitive to the challenges surrounding COVID. So really it depends on the individual. If they know who that CF is, they might already have a rapport and some trust there. If not, they might, and even if they do, they might prefer the person have gloves on, but that makes it difficult to note sensation in levels of communication. It's really a matter of preference. So we look at the comfort level of both the facilitator and the client. Also we bring hand sanitizer which is used frequently during the assignment. Everyone has a mask on. Gloves if both parties request it. So we're using those levels of PPE at this point.

DARRIN: This is Darrin speaking. Al brought up a good set of issues to talk through. Is there a vax mandate for the CFs? Where do we stand on that? Or does it remain a personal choice?

KEVIN: At this point, there is no mandate in place. We've reached to attorney to some other states who already operate communication facilitator or co-navigator services, CN services. They don't have any mandates in place. We talked with our communication facilitator committee about whether or not we should mandate those types of things. Some folks don't want to be vaccinated for religious reasons or for other health concerns. If we were to require a vaccine card, how would the deafblind client vet that when the person arrives because they're not going to be able to visually access that card. So we thought the better route to take would be requiring and providing a certain level of PPE versus mandating vaccinations.

AL: Al speaking. Will we be held liable in the event that we do not have a vax mandate, that both parties will be protected, both the deafblind person and the CF personnel? Is there any way to make sure that we will not become evidence in the case of liability? What is the state's posture on that? I mean, personally, I think that there should be a vax mandate. And anyone who would not submit to that would be barred from employment in this context, given the close and tactile nature of the interaction and the communication that that necessitates. It would be a high risk no brainer, absolutely I think there should be something like that in place.

KEVIN: Well, the two facilitators who we were using, there were two folks who said they were sick. So we replaced them with other facilitators. Most of the folks we're using now are more sensitive to the specific concerns of the deafblind community when it comes to COVID transmission, and they've been respectful of that. Honestly, in terms of accountability and liability, I would have to follow up on that with the state because I hadn't thought of that.

AL: Al speaking. If I had a deafblind person enter my home, I would definitely have some kind of a mandate for vaccination. If not, they would have to keep their distance. I think all of our CFs should be. I mean, of course religious exemptions aside, those people should just keep their distance. And if that is their beliefs, then they can't be a part of the pool. It's black and white to me.

KEVIN: That's something I'm going to have to follow up with the communication facilitator committee on. Our communication facilitators directly contract with the MAT program. So we can make the final determination if somebody is sick whether or not they should be sent to an assignment, whether or not they're vaccinated, so on and so forth.

AL: I agree, it's their responsibility, and if they opt not to, I don't know how you can work with a deafblind person. I do remember that we made mention about having to replace all of the outdated devices from the last, say, 5 years or something. What is our plan to do so? Because my iPad is getting older. I would like to know.

KEVIN: So the iPad program runs on a 3-year time line. We actually have had several folks reach out to us because they wanted to replace their iPads after that 3-year window. That doesn't happen immediately. It's essentially basically if your iPad is still functioning and working appropriately, the client would continue to use it until the point where it actually stops functioning if it were to break, if it becomes unusable. That's the point where we would swap it out with a new one.

During that 3-year period it would have to be sent in for repairs, to Teltex to be fixed because it would be under warranty. In the event they can't fix it, they would then replace it with a new one. So we would follow whatever their feedback was.

Is your iPad still working, Al?

AL: It does. It does work just fine. It's smaller. A bigger one would be nice.

KEVIN: It's the mini? Is it difficult for you to see? You might want a larger screen? In that case, for visible accessibility reasons, it would be eligible to be replaced. We can talk offline.

AL: Yep, we can talk offline.

KEVIN: We've had similar instances where folks have started to have issues with their sight and they've had to replace their screens for a larger one.

Travis?

TRAVIS: This is Travis speaking. Just one comment. Kevin and I were just discussing something. I can air it for everyone's benefit. NASRA and TEDPA were talking about offering a workshop, a virtual workshop on communication facilitators. There will be a panel as well to spotlight what other folks are doing, so we encouraged the CF program and in other states as well to be in support of their deafblind folks.

KEVIN: Fantastic. Good to know that Maryland would be on that panel.

Any other questions?

That being said, that concludes my report.

AL: Outstanding.

What's up next?

TRAVIS: The access folks are asking if this would be a good time for a break.

AL: Could we take 10 minutes? It's now 10:30. If everybody could come back at 10:40, that would be great. We'll see everyone in 10 minutes. Thank you.

[Break]

DONNA: Good morning, everyone. My name is Donna Broadway, and I am the outreach manager. I am here to present the public relations and outreach report.

So what is new with Maryland Relay? Since we last met, we have pivoted our outreach to include more community events, law enforcement communities, businesses with our Relay Partner trainings, 911 PSAP and RTT training. So Rebecca Miller attended the Aberdeen Whoville craft fair. She made this tree that you see on the screen. And then Tarita did a presentation at Parkville High School in Baltimore County. And also hosted an outreach table at the Randallstown Library in Baltimore County.

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So we recently attended winter MACO in Cambridge, and we made a lot of good contacts. We actually had a PSAP demonstration, where they had like PSAP simulators from six different PSAPs in Maryland. So we were able to go and look at that and get some contacts. We connected with public officials from all over the state, and then our upcoming events include the Library Association and the Brain Injury Association of Maryland.

So we recently held our 30th anniversary celebration in our office on December 1, and we had past directors, staff, and GABTR members who attended the celebration. It went very well. When I wrote this, the COVID rates were not at almost 30%, so when I wrote this, we were planning to have another in-person celebration in April, but due to the rise in COVID rates and we really don't know what is going to be happening in April, we kind of have to put a pin on that. And we're going to have to pivot and see what it looks like in a couple of months.

So we are also planning a series of collaborative presentations similar to the Lunch and Learns, but we plan to collaborate and work with different agencies around the state. We will be reaching out to various members of the board because our sessions will focus on the communities that the board serves.

And then while it is slow, generally the first quarter tends to be slow due to the colder weather and just people getting I guess back in the office and reacclimated, and due to the rising numbers of COVID. So certain places may have more protocols and we can't come in as easily. So we will be doing mailing. And some field visits but we may have to pivot on that as well. The plan was to take collateral to several places including state, city, and county agencies, senior homes, audiologists, and businesses, with the idea that in-person engagement will help generate interest in our program.

So what we did during of the last quarter, we had 32 exhibits, 13 presentations, 20 networking opportunities, 41 meetings, and 2 sponsorships. So the outreach team has been working very hard.

Some of the highlights, Tarita recently give a presentation about speech to speech services to the stroke survivor's support group in Towson. Rebecca attended her very first in-person event in September. And I was there and Tarita was there. And she managed a table at the Mid-Atlantic ADA conference which was held in Baltimore City. And Jenny recently did a series of visits, one of which included visiting the Richard Clark Senior Center in Charles County, and that was for a Veterans Day event.

Our continued outreach efforts, like I stated before, some of this has changed because when I wrote the report, the numbers weren't as high, and even though the Governor is taking measures to make sure that people have testing, they have masks, we don't know what's going to happen with the event and sponsorships because some of these events can have up to 500 to a couple thousand people depending on the size of the event. So we want to make sure that everyone is safe and healthy, but we also don't want to have interruption in service in doing our outreach. So we have advertisements, webinars, mailings, virtual/hybrid events, networking/making new contacts, and field visits.

Are there any questions.

Yes, Mr. Cooper.

STEVE: Yes. Hi, thank you. Steve here. This really is more directed to probably David or Travis, but I don't know if it comes under outreach. Our website. And I know this has been talked about. It was down for a while. The link to the advisory board was not available. It's back up. The link to staff is still not available. On the advisory board, it says the next GABTR meeting is July 16, 2020. The annual report, the last annual report is 2017. And it's really just a pet peeve of mine, but when I go to a company's website, or an organization's website, and postings are 4-5 years old, I question not the legitimacy, but just doesn't look good. So it's more of a request than a question. If there's any way we can put pressure on, from my understanding, the information technology department handles our website. We've been talking about this for a year.

DONNA: I apologize for those things on the website. So one of the main things with the website is that it was supposed to change hands. So technically our website is under DoIT, but we were supposed to be moving to DoD, which is housed under the Department of Commerce. And DoIT was supposed to be updating our website. So we have been able to get some website updates. And they have made some changes. Devaney was having trouble getting access which messed with keeping the website updated because they didn't have access for maybe like a month or two. But recently they have access and they have been going through. So we will definitely make sure the website is updated. I'm not sure if the changes that DoIT is making, because they are making changes to our website, how that is going to affect it. So it's probably affecting some of the pages that you do not see. And then we should be moving to the DoD platform soon. So I will hopefully have an update on that during our next GABTR meeting, but it is the state and this is a process that has been ongoing for a couple of years now. But we will definitely do our best to keep our website updated.

STEVE: I might just bring some specific things to you offline, bring to your attention, board members whose term expired in 2019, some other things that we should try and address. And thank you.

DONNA: Yeah, definitely. Yes, please send that to me and we will make sure that is handled. Thank you.

AL: This is Al speaking. Thank you very much indeed, Steve, for that question with respect to the website. And I am in agreement with that. We certainly do need to have an update there.

My question, if I may, for you, Donna, is about some confusion in role between you, Donna, as the PR point person, and then there's this Devaney vendor, who is the PR agency with whom we have a contract at TAM. So can you describe the delineation of what contractually Devaney is to do and contrast that with what you do?

DONNA: So Devaney is our vendor. So if we need anything related to marketing and outreach, so they help create our collateral. They help with keeping our website, our social media updated, and then they also act as a vendor for Hamilton, so if Hamilton needs anything related to the outreach coordinators, maybe they need to source events or they need to make a payment, then Devaney handles it. But Devaney doesn't do anything without the approval of the TAM staff, which is myself. So usually if there's something that is needed, it goes through me, so I'll make the request or another TAM member will make the request, and I'm CCed on the email or our Hamilton staff, if they need something, then that would go through me and I would approve that. So I'm kind of the oversight over Devaney to make sure that the stuff that we need for our marketing and outreach program is done.

AL: I might be biased, having been involved in this program with TAM since its inception 30 years ago. I do recall that there was a time when we brought Devaney on as our PR vendor. And the fact that we have the same agency as we first contracted with is surprising to me, that we haven't switched that out with someone else, had a new statement of work or solicitation go out. And the fact that everything isn't sort of updated. I'm certainly not convinced that the Devaney folks are updating things. For example, I know that we still are using high register text in promotional materials, and often the audience that we serve, Deaf folks, don't have that command of written English literacy, them being sign language users, most of our audience. So I'm wondering if the choice of words in text is not a great match for our audience, I'm wondering if Devaney has any folks on their staff who are themselves Deaf or if they're getting any input whatsoever from people who are Deaf in the community? And I think this has been going on for decades. The whole 30 years, I want to say. And all the deliverables I've seen from them, I'm sorry to say.

Also, I don't think the mailing list captures many Deaf folks. I have asked many of my fellow members of the community in Maryland whether or not they hear from TAM or from this program, and they have indicated that they do not.

I would rather find an agency or a vendor who are plugged in to the Deaf community, and there are a few such people out there. I have informed people of this meeting, but we continue to see low numbers in attendance. I don't know if they keep folks updated. And I think that for emails and E-blasts and all those sorts of things, there's technology that you can bring to bear from this, but I don't see it from them. I don't know if that's a Devaney function, but if it is, I don't feel like they're meeting that requirement. And you as the oversight, Donna, I would just encourage you to push back to the vendor on what our expectations for them would be. And I'm very happy to help you in that effort and do whatever I can to support the PR arm of TAM for your projects and programs.

I don't know if there's other folks on this board who would agree with me.

DONNA: Definitely thank you for the feedback.

Go ahead, Mr. Smith.

DARRIN: If I may, this is Darrin. So Al, Melissa just dropped in the chat that Devaney & Associates has a contract with Hamilton Relay to satisfy the contract requirements with the state of Maryland. D&A has received feedback from TAM staff and has reached out to Deaf vendors to work on various projects. The feedback is very helpful, and we appreciate any additional feedback that anybody may have.

With that said, by Melissa in the chat, I would like to ask, what is the current language within the contract? And what does it stipulate? Because if, for example, Devaney & Associates, D&A, if they haven't met the expectations of TAM and/or GABTR, do we have the ability to renegotiate those requirements? Or is the contract locked? Do we have that flexibility to renegotiate? We could possibly ask for a contract mod for them to maybe bring on some Deaf individuals to be part of their organization, for example. Just a discussion point that I'm raising. I would like to know a little bit more about the language of the contract if at all possible.

DONNA: Travis knows more about the contract than I do. But as far as the feedback on Devaney, thank you for that. That is something to definitely think about, and we will have more of an update at the next meeting. But it's definitely something to think about. Thank you.

TRAVIS: Thank you, Donna. If there's language I can pull, I will do so and distribute it to the board for your review.

If there are any further questions, I invite you to send them in via email. Correct me if I'm wrong, please, but there is an ability to modify the contract and expand services or make revisions as is necessary. Certainly it's not locked or fixed in any way. As we approach the time in making those modifications, I think that -- well, we can certainly talk about reporting that out in the next meeting. And at this stable, we need to figure out a way to document what kinds of things might be included in such language and propose them, and of course that process takes time. And then the implementation will take further time. So when we will actually see changes realized is anyone's guess because of the length of the process, but it takes some wrangling with legal and other kinds of discussions and series of meetings in order for those modifications to be put forward and then operationalized. So once we do that, of course with the state contract folks as well, we will report in due course. If there's anything further to be talked about on that, I can certainly apprise everyone, and David can as well.

Does that satisfy that?

AL: Yes, thank you.

Okay. Does that conclude all the reports from the TAM office?

TRAVIS: It does indeed, Al.

AL: Okay. I would like to follow up with an additional question. Sorry, I still have a bone to pick with the SCC, the Senior Call Check. We are paying that Senior Call Check program. Therefore, wouldn't it then mean that they would be giving us a report as well since they are drawing funding from our program? Where is their report?

DAVID: I can field that question. My response would be, there is no legal requirement in place. The Department of Aging would issue a report to us. They do fund any number of programs such as the Maryland state library, NFB NEWSLINE reading program. We fund them as well through the Cooper law. And they don't issue us a report either. But, for example, for example at GABTR we do require letters to be submitted on an annual basis, but these folks are not required to file anything with us.

AL: Okay. So that letter, does that include the Senior Call Check and the library?

DAVID: No. It talks about the activities of GABTR and TAM exclusively. We don't touch on the other partners. But it is certainly possible that we could comment upon those if there's an appetite for that. And if you wanted to provide that formal counsel to TAM as the body of GABTR, that's fine.

AL: I would like any expenditures for other programs should be reflected in some type of report, even from that agency itself to the state. I think there should be some report given to us. We should be aware of where our money is going. That's my personal opinion on the subject as it were.

DAVID: We could look at a memorandum of understanding, MOU, as we come to interagency agreements between MDOD, TAM, and other organizations like the department on aging. They submit their budget requests to us before they make them to the legislature. So we do plan for that. Also other matters of access. There are several items which certainly we would like to undertake with MDOA, but as you all well know, in our attempts to work more closely with Aging staff, the secretary there on several things regarding the program, via access and budget and things like that, let's just say that it has not been as successful as we had hoped. And a lot of that, certainly if there are any emerging activities that we could talk through, any new bureaucracy that we could navigate, such as those barriers have presented, then the MOU I think would go a long way to make the SCC program work better for our population.

AL: Can we clarify MDOA?

DAVID: The Maryland Department of Aging. That's who administers the Senior Call Check program. Sorry about that.

AL: So I just feel it's our responsibility to be informed and apprised of what's happening with the money that we're spending. I mean, we're spending a significant amount of money on the Senior Call Check program, and I feel like we should have information in terms of what's happening within that program.

DAVID: This is David speaking. One thing that comes to mind such as we've talked about before, we certainly could pursue, would be to invite one of the staff from the Maryland Department of Aging. I think there was Peter who we had worked with in the past who could possibly be brought in to present on what their program has been up to and fill us in.

AL: I would like to be a part of that. Travis, could you send something out to the board, CCing maybe with the PowerPoint or something?

TRAVIS: This is Travis speaking. I'm not 100% understanding where we're headed with this, but you want to know about GABTR's oversight of TAM? Or oversight of USTF? Is that where you were headed with that? Correct me if I'm wrong. The Universal Service Trust Fund is not a telecommunications fund as such. Do you want to know whether or not we have oversight over that? Or whether there are other recipients of that fund who would also draw from it? Is that the point at issue, where the funding is coming from? I'm not clear entirely. I want to understand. I'm sure maybe other folks have questions as well.

DAVID: So this is David. Technically, according to COMAR, if we look at COMAR, the Secretary of the Department controls the USTF, which in our case the Secretary of the Department of Disabilities is Secretary Beatty. However, for all intents and purposes, that funding is regulated by us with the advice of GABTR. GABTR certainly does have a very specific role in terms of providing policy-specific advice for the implementation of relay, of the MAT program, and I believe just general operations now, I can bring up the specific language within COMAR and share that out if you would like to see it in its entirety.

AL: So is SCC, my question is, from what Travis said, part of our responsibilities as well under USTF?

DAVID: The short answer is no. If you look within the regs, the SCC does not fall under what GABTR advises us on.

AL: So that comes from our budget, and we don't have the responsibility of the whole of USTF? They seem to be quite siloed and separate as funding sources.

DAVID: Well, this is David again. We are the piggy bank essentially for the SCC.

Darrin?

DARRIN: This is Darrin. This gives me a bit of concern that we have no language that actually outlines -- well, for example, if we spend $500 and have no oversight on what it was spent on, that gives me a bit of concern. It seems like if we are administering USTF original funds for a program that we are supporting financially, they should close the loop and tell us how they're using that money. But this was mentioned earlier about the CF program as well about the budget. What does that mean for the USTF? And if the money is as reported sort of diminishing in a downward trajectory to 2027, I want to make good and sure that we have a strong budget for the next 30 years if expenditures go up. I don't want to see inflation and other things do away with that fund. I want to make sure these programs and services are adequately supported in what they need to expend. So if there is some kind of an MOU in place annually, could there be something in there to make sure that there is an accountability for the budget, an obligation to report or give updates on the nature of those expenditures? And if so, if TAM is their bank, we don't have any recourse to approve or deny any requests without making an informed decision on whether or not maybe we would need funds returned. If we're the bank, isn't there an expectation for us to be apprised of the kinds of operational things that these expenditures are being applied to?

I think this is critical. Especially with program costs on the rise as they are. And I would like to see an MOU put in place for our organization so that given the fact that they are funded by us, we should have some oversight of USTF-originated funds. If the secretary signs such an MOU, then I think that the language should clarify an oversight role. And I really want to see an MOU put in place in the next year, year and a half.

That's all from me on that.

AL: It's interesting. We're having this conversation, and we've heard what Travis has to say, and then David, which you mentioned earlier in the conversation during today's meeting about the surcharge to the USTF and where the funding comes from, that surcharge of 5 cents. And the fact that we're going to have to possibly have a conversation of it increasing to 6 or 7 cents. That means that we are going to have to do lobbying, we're going to have to take some action down in Annapolis with the Senate to pass that type of change.

DAVID: (Shakes head from side to side.)

AL: We would have to address state government, wouldn't we? Who is responsible for that?

DAVID: This is David. The PSC, the Public Service Commission, or the comptroller. That language indicates that TAM and the Public Service Commission shall set forth the rate or a fee as it is known at a level that is necessitated by whatever expenditures are for the upcoming year.

So in that sense, we're not in danger of breaking the bank in any way because we have kind of an advanced awareness and communication with the Public Service Commission on rates.

AL: Understood. Who is responsible for monitoring, to make sure? Is that us as the board?

DAVID: Our financial manager, Mr. Leslie.

AL: And he is part of TAM. Okay. Then who should be informed when we start needing to have that conversation to justify a reasonable increase? And we're not going to be able to do that if we don't, for example, factor what's happening with the SCC. So who knows what's going on with the SCC? How it's impacting the USTF would then add fuel to our justification for needing to increase the surcharge. Without that information, we will be left with egg on our face and not look like we have a valid justification. Does that make sense?

DAVID: I believe that if we have a presentation, there can be a written report as well provided that delineates the activities or summarizes them for the year.

AL: As of this point, we don't have any report about the Senior Call Check program. We have nothing. We're basically flying blind in terms of providing this funding.

TRAVIS: This is Travis speaking. If I may, you mentioned about the 6 cents increase. I can allow Leslie to crunch the numbers on that. Maybe convene some kind of group to figure out exactly what the budgetary needs would be --

AL: No, no, no, no, no. I'm trying to just talk about this from the terms of like concept, macro level. I'm not concerned about the numbers so to speak. I'm talking about later on down the line if the need arises for us to increase that surcharge, we should have all the necessary evidence, all the data that we need to be able to justify said increase. We're spending money on the Senior Call Check program and nobody knows what's happening within that program. And I think that's information we could utilize.

Leslie?

LESLIE: I believe what you mentioned, Al, is correct. If we put in place an MOU and put the language in the MOU that allows us to get the information that you're inquiring about, it will give us more detail of what is happening with the funds and how it's being spent. An MOU would resolve that issue. So that is something we could probably put into place in the near future. Currently I could start working on MOU process and get an MOU in place going forward.

JOHN: This is John Brennan. May I say something?

AL: Who is speaking? I missed it.

JOHN: Sorry. I'm joining by phone today. This is John Brennan. I'm just wondering if I could --

AL: Go ahead, John.

JOHN: Thanks.

So we actually do get some information on what they're doing because they invoice -- they give the program invoices for the cost of the program. The last invoice that we got was primarily for personnel. So if we request it, we can get a summary of program activity. I don't think that, you know, that that information is not attainable. David and I have talked about the Senior Call Check program and its impact on the funding for quite a while now. I don't know when the best time will be to present to the administration, whether it's this one or the next one that comes in once a new Governor is in place about increasing the rate. But that discussion would be both about the increased cost of the program, based on what David, the activities that we have initiated for the TAM program, as well as the Senior Call Check program. But at the time that we try to ask for that increase, we would like to coordinate with the board and get the information we need to make an informed request. And if that does involve the GABTR board members or other members of the Deaf community doing some advocacy, we could make sure that they have that information.

But it's not like we don't have any idea what the program is doing. We can get information on it. Maybe between now and the next GABTR board meeting we can get some information and provide an update on exactly what they've been doing. I do know -- I can't remember the exact amount, but the program costs less than what we projected, and so that in turn has less of an impact on the USTF.

Those are my thoughts on it. I don't know at what -- I'm still not exactly sure at what point it makes sense to ask for an increase because we still have a surplus at this point, and the timing, you know, the projections say that revenue, you know, we wouldn't reach sort of a tipping point until I think it was 2017 -- or I'm sorry, 2027. But it is something that David is monitoring closely and I'm working to support his efforts to try to figure out the exact timing around requesting that rate increase.

AL: Excellent. This is Al speaking. I think there is a dual objective here, being the budgetary portion, also the level of accessibility in the SCC program itself. That includes, that should include Deaf senior citizens. Certainly that would be the persons who they're also responsible for, getting access to. And of course that intersects with us because that access happens in a telecommunications channel. So we need to make sure we can get ahold of people who have hearing loss or people who have speech disabilities or what have you. And what is the process for doing so? We have asked this of them since 2017 when they stood this program up to make sure that the SCC was accessible, and they've indicated that they will and would do so, but it remains not entirely so. So we need some updates on that for sure.

If there are any further questions on this topic, we're happy to have that. If not, shall I turn the floor over to Hamilton for their report?

Seeing none, going once, going twice, three times...

Okay. Shall we proceed, then, with members of the board of GABTR giving any reports as necessary? How about our Vice Chair. Darrin, do you have anything you would like to report?

DARRIN: We had our first MCOD meeting, Maryland Commission on Disabilities, for the 2022 year in January.

AL: What is MCOD?

DARRIN: The Maryland Commission on Disabilities. MCOD.

And we had conversations about what we're predicting for legislative session, their role. Basically for legislative session they are going to provide oversight on any bills that might impact any disability population within the state of Maryland. That's basically my report. I will have more to share moving forward as we progress through the legislative session.

AL: Thank you, Darrin.

Happy to entertain any other members of the GABTR board who has anything to share. Glenn, I think you maybe had something to share? If you do, Glenn, if you are with us, the Chair recognizes Glenn Lockhart.

I'll see if Glenn is still included on our participants list for this meeting. Glenn, you have the floor if you're here. Come on in.

I guess he's dozed off.

Is there any other members of the board who would have anything to share, offer any words.

KEN: This is Ken Putkovich here. We had some difficulty in joining the meeting this morning. And we had difficulty joining the last meeting in October. We never did make it in. So there must be some disconnect from the standpoint of announcing the meeting and our getting the notification of a link to join the meeting. So I would appreciate it if the next time a link is included in any information that's passed to us. It took three or four or five phone calls before I got in touch with anybody at TAM, and fortunately Tarita gave me her cell phone number and I got to speak to her on her cell phone and she had us join the meeting. But there must be some disconnect from the standpoint of notifications. So I would appreciate it if we would -- if somebody would check to see whether we're on the list to get the link necessary to join the Zoom meeting.

I have no report as the representative for senior citizens. I'm derelict in that regard, but I'll try to have something for the next meeting. Thank you.

TRAVIS: Hi, this is Travis speaking. We will certainly make sure that you're added on the link. You are on the calendar invite that was sent out. It's typically sent out a week after every GABTR meeting. The following week after each meeting, a link is sent out for the next meeting. So I'll double check to make sure you're included on that, and we will also send it to you directly, Ken, so we've noted that.

KEN: Thank you.

AL: I just got a notification from Glenn that a couple of minutes ago he needed to step away for a few minutes. So it looks like he should be back directly. I don't know if he's around right now. Maybe he stepped away from his screen for a few minutes.

There we are.

GLENN: I'm here. My apologies. What did I miss? Al, can you see me?

DARRIN: This is Darrin speaking. We're just doing member reports.

GLENN: Okay. Great. No report.

AL: But there was an email from you about something in the minutes, was there?

GLENN: Oh, yes. Hold on. Let me close my door. Bear with me for one second.

My apologies. Yes, I did have a comment. I would like to talk a little bit about getting the minutes in writing possibly 2-3 days prior to the meeting. So having the minutes for us to be able to review instead of the CART transcript. And I'm just wondering if the other members would be in agreement on that.

That was my only comment.

AL: So the substance of your question is wondering whether or not we could get the minutes earlier, such as 2 business days in advance.

GLENN: Essentially. Really it's a go-part comment. The first one is the CART transcript. Getting that in lieu of the minutes, I'm not sure about that, if that's actually permissible within the state. I have no idea what the regulations are, whether that can be substituted for the minutes.

And the second part, I would like to have the materials a little bit more in advance of when we currently get them.

AL: That sounds like a David or Travis question.

TRAVIS: Yes, Travis here. Happy to do so. When I came on board to run the GABTR meetings, it looked as though they had been using CART transcripts as minutes. And I just sort of catch as catch can at the moment, doing what I could to catch up. It looks like you're the first person who has made I don't want to call it complaint but the comment that that doesn't necessarily work. But it is a practice that had been historically in place.

GLENN: My question is if state regs permit that. I would say let's look at COMAR because it is not an official record of the meeting. So I don't know if we need to look back at that.

TRAVIS: We don't submit them to the state.

GLENN: But they're posted for public review, correct?

TRAVIS: We are, and we could certainly look into that. That is the historical practice.

As for the second part of your question, giving those materials out, as you know, at this meeting, it was 4 weeks in advance of this meeting that I was asking for input for the agenda and getting full reports usually does come at the 11th hour. We try to get that into the deck and into the documents. So you'll see in the last two days there was some version control issues.

GLENN: I do recognize the challenge. That's fine. I understand it has to go to Devaney to be edit and the PowerPoint developed. I'm just looking at different perspectives from the board, making sure everybody has time to prepare.

TRAVIS: We welcome that. And getting folks to submit their information earlier rather than later is the kind of bottleneck that we go through. But boards run as they do, so we try to make this one run as smoothly as possible to document and receive those submissions internally.

AL: So you really have three comments. Travis, come back up, please. Thank you. So we'll really talking about three separate issues here. The first one is essentially timing for the minutes; whether or not a transcript is acceptable as minutes; and what you were just talking about, the PowerPoint piece, the materials for the meeting and when they are disseminated to the group.

For the minutes/transcript issue, I think that's separate from the PowerPoint. The PowerPoint is for the presentation during the meeting. Talking about the minutes or transcript from the previous meeting, I think those need to be disseminated separately. So you merging the meeting minutes with the PowerPoint, I think it would be easier to keep it separate, because the PowerPoint is really for the meeting itself and that could be done I think a little bit closer to the date of the meeting, whereas the minutes need to be disseminated closer to the previous meeting, sooner rather than later. Does that articulate what you're saying, Glenn?

GLENN: Yes. Travis, are we on the same page, then?

TRAVIS: Yes. I did drop the ball. I usually put the attachment on the calendar invitation, on the Google invite, but I hadn't done so this time. I will do that going forward. That will not be I problem whatsoever.

AL: I would bring up the suggestion that either yourself or David check to see if a CART transcript is an acceptable substitute for an official meeting minutes, that record. Just check Maryland policy on that one. I'm sure there's a policy on this somewhere.

TRAVIS: Can do. I'll check in to that and make sure and get back to the both of you gentlemen.

AL: And if that's acceptable, I think it's fine to continue as we're doing. If not, we need an official record of the meeting. And it is posted for public viewing. I don't know if there's a time line that has to happen, maybe 30 days within the meeting, for example. I think that's something we need to look at.

TRAVIS: I don't know where I would find that. I'm not familiar with that procedure or protocol.

AL: That's due diligence that's going to have to be done. Probably under the Open Meetings Act or somewhere within state policy you can look into that.

TRAVIS: I'll certainly take a look at that.

AL: I mean, we are a state group, so we need to follow state policy.

The board recognizes Darrin.

DARRIN: Yes. So Al is right. If we need to follow OMA, the Open Meeting Act, if we need to follow that, then the minutes are required to be posted on the TAM website. So for example whenever any organization has their meetings, they post those minutes. ODHH, for example. So our minutes as well need to be posted on our website in order to comply with that policy, with that statute.

The other issue is that the question is who is going to write out those minutes. The bylaws don't mention a secretary or anybody in that type of position. We don't need to have a secretary necessarily, but we would need to have someone who would be responsible for writing those minutes out. So that would be another issue that we would need to resolve since we do not have a secretary position currently. Unless we wanted to include that in the bylaws to add a secretary, but currently we don't have any other specific position that would be responsible for recording the minutes, which is why I think in the past we have preferred to use the transcript as the minutes. So until we add some sort of language to the bylaws, and by the way, we are still talking about scheduling a meeting maybe next week to talk about ideas and what to do with the current bylaws, but maybe during our next meeting we can add that and do a very, very, very rough draft that we could get out to people. But in the meantime, there's a little bit of an impasse here because we don't have a secretary position that could be responsible for taking those minutes.

TRAVIS: This is Travis speaking. The responsibility in that case would probably fall to me because I am the GABTR liaison. In my role, that would be under my purview. So I can certainly take on those secretarial responsibilities going forward. I do believe that would be a part of my formal duties, if I'm not mistaken, in working with the GABTR board.

AL: That's correct. But first let's do our due diligence to see whether or not what Maryland says, whether a transcript is acceptable. If the answer is no, then we'll work on developing minutes.

TRAVIS: Absolutely. I'll look into the history about whether TAM had historically been posting those to the Deaf community. It's news to me if so. But that's fine, I'm very happy to revise our practices according to whatever is most appropriate. So I will work on that. Thank you very much indeed, Al.

AL: Thank you, Travis.

All right. Any additional comments or reports from board representatives?

Seeing none, any comments from the public?

Any announcements?

Are we ready to adjourn? Going once, going twice...

DARRIN: Al, congratulations on becoming a great grandfather.

AL: Thank you. I am now a great grandfather as of last week.

DARRIN: Steve, it looks like you were coming in to make a comment?

STEVE: Yes. I was just looking at the agenda. Are we foregoing Hamilton's report?

TRAVIS: You're correct, Steve. We are going to forego that. But if there is a point that you would like to cover from it... we changed that format because we had so much other material. We didn't want to be up against a time crunch for a hard stop. Outreach from Donna was going to highlight on some of those Hamilton-related activities anyway. But if you felt like something got short shrift or if you maybe find another more efficient way to do this, certainly they are in this meeting and at the ready to answer your questions as needed. So please, if you need to speak with them, now is the time. If you have a question, they are here to be in support of that.

STEVE: Thank you. Steve here. Just one specific question. And it goes back to budget projections. In the PowerPoint, the Maryland captioned telephone conversation minutes. They're showing roughly December 19 to August 20, roughly 14,000 minutes a month. It's dropped from the second half of July '21 to about 6,000 minutes a month, which I assume might be people switching over to internet based.

But assuming we were getting $20 a minute, we would be saving 160,000 a year, just on those minutes, the captioning service alone. If we were paying $30 an hour for a captionist, we would be saving about a quarter of a million dollars a year. So is that, for Hamilton, is that a trend that we will use less captioned minutes?

MELISSA: This is Melissa. Historically, yes, captioned telephone did have higher usage, and Al, this is Melissa speaking.

As Travis has alluded to with the transition from analogue to digital, those minutes, we are seeing them decrease. We are seeing some phone providers that are switching their technology to digital services, and some of the captioned telephone users don't realize that this is happening. So when they go to use their captioned telephone, suddenly it's not working appropriately. And that is part of the work that the TAM staff has done, reaching out to folks, trying to understand if they're having some difficulties there. And Hamilton provides multiple reports to provide visibility for that.

Nationwide we are seeing captioned telephone minutes decrease. With advances in technology, that certainly contributes to that.

STEVE: So for Leslie, that might be a plus that we can incorporate into our projections. But a quarter of a million dollars in a $13 million assets is a small amount. But if it continues to increase, we could be looking at a decrease of half a million dollars a year. And that's using the assumption that we're only paying $30 an hour for the captionist. Thank you.

TRAVIS: This is Travis speaking. Something comes to mind. Maybe, David, you had something?

DAVID: This is David speaking. Unfortunately we are limited in our flexibility with respect to how we spend our funding. For example, should we opt to use a captionist and there's an RCC request in place, we can't go more than 2500 a month on an individual. It becomes an issue for their employment. So we need to contract with Hamilton. Certainly we're authorized up to 20 million over 5 years' time, and we could provide a larger venue for that. But it is quite pricey relative to the other kinds of services. But yes, we have to remain flexible in how we spend our funding, and in some cases, we are limited. In some cases we need to be prudent in our choices in order to save the fund itself.

TRAVIS: And if I may, just to clarify about cost, $30 an hour and volume, as David mentioned. For example, you have to consider and factor in the cost of training, the cost of facilities, the cost of support for operating CART services, whether at home or from a center. There are many other factors. The managing, those who schedule the time, there's HR support needed for that. So it's not just one individual. There's a lot on the back end that also has to be considered in terms of the price point.

However, we are very aggressively looking for ways to save money and to decrease our costs. Just to give you one example, RCC typically costs us about 200-$300 an hour for the service and all of the facets of the service that I just mentioned.

Now, for a Deaf and hard of hearing organization or really any organization that is out there, we try to in lieu of that provide sponsorships, and we do that sponsorship through Natalie Ennis, who is our CART provider at the moment. She has a wonderful team that works with her and her company. They are all local, Maryland sourced. They know the players, they know the game, they know the terminology. And they provide the CART services and we fund that as a sponsorship. That is a significant cost savings for us versus using the general RCC service which charges us more. So we're trying to be creative and think outside the box in terms of providing support for the community and saving us money. It's a win win for us. It's a win win for us as a third party and for the community as well. All three of those.

So if you think of any organizations in the state of Maryland that might need support in that capacity, of having that type of live captioning, let us know, because again, we can do that as a sponsorship, and at the same time, it provides us increased visibility and marketability in the community because we're typically recognized as being a sponsor in that way.

AL: Fair enough.

If there are any other additional folks who would like to come on screen? Darrin, the floor is yours.

DARRIN: I didn't have a chance to read out from the regs, which Glenn sent in the chat. It indicates -- let me get the language right. Firstly, yes required to have written notice and written minutes.

AL: Your hands were covered.

DARRIN: Oh, sorry. I'll do my best.

So a couple things. The section of the regs for GABTR indicates a requirement to let the community know about upcoming meetings. So it might be that Travis going forward has to issue some kind of public notice to the community to alert them of these meetings.

Secondly, there is no language with respect to transcripts. However, it does have language that gets at recordings. So any audio streaming would be invoked here. We need to make sure we're flexible in the ability to use a transcript rather than audio because this is -- if I'm not mistaken, Travis, this is recorded and streamed?

TRAVIS: Not currently. We had some technical difficulties today. So we're just working off the transcript for now.

DARRIN: Okay. So we are not recording this session?

TRAVIS: It was earlier, up until a certain point, and then we stopped because there were issues with -- the reason, just to explain, for some reason the stream was only showing the PowerPoint. It wasn't showing the participants. So we couldn't see anyone signing.

DARRIN: Okay. So in which case Travis and David and some of us will have a discussion about the protocols going forward. And the recording that does exist, there should be some leeway for us to use a transcript in lieu of that. And there should be some formal structure put in place going forward.

TRAVIS: And that's certainly an idea we can discuss offline.

DARRIN: Great.

AL: This is Al speaking. Excellent.

Anything further from any members of the GABTR board who would like to pop in and have their say?

If not, we will stand adjourned. Going once, going twice, three times...

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We will see you in 3 months’ time.

Go ahead and pop in so we can see you if you're amenable to that.

TRAVIS: Good to see you, Deirdre. This is Travis.

DEIRDRE: Hello.

TRAVIS: Thank you to everyone for your participation today. Outstanding to have you.

Hi, Betty. Hi, Ken. Hiya. Great to see you. Thank you for being with us. I'll get you that dang link next time, Ken, don't you worry.

KEN: Appreciate that.

TRAVIS: Hey, Steve. What's going on?

STEVE: Happy New Year.

TRAVIS: How have you been?

STEVE: I've been great, considering everything that's going on these days. Montgomery County has offered free take-home COVID tests, although you're in D.C. I believe you have them as well. Which is a relief.

TRAVIS: We do. Yeah. We're stockpiling them because you can't be sure and if you can get them. So we've got them.

STEVE: I'm running to the library. They're giving them out again.

TRAVIS: Yeah, there's a table set up in the front of the library and you can grab a couple of them. At my daughter's school, which is like a block away, they had two tests per kid, and I've got two kids. So we used one apiece and then we kept two in the hopper. Only necessary if we get a positive. Then we'll need to confirm a positive. But we've got the second ones in the hopper in case we need them.

Personally, I admit, full disclosure, I have not tested myself. I have not had the need to. I haven't had any symptoms, I've been super healthy the last 2 years. Masking has helped. And I've kept very healthy. So I haven't had the necessity to.

STEVE: Where it came in handy for us was for Christmas. We all wanted to get together. Some of my family members are more concerned about exposure, so we made a plan that we would all do an instant test within 24 hours of getting together, and we had a wonderful time.

TRAVIS: I'm in the same boat. I have some plans coming up in a couple of months and I have agreed to be tested.

Was I freezing?

STEVE: I put the meetings on my calendar, and the invite you have, if you reply yes, it automatically adds it to my calendar. But I always have a meeting and I'm always like, oh, my gosh, where is the link! So maybe within the week prior, send a fresh email, hey, folks, here's the link, because then it's at the top of your inbox. But that's only for us people that are challenged technologically.

TRAVIS: I will for sure stage that to be ready in the week leading up. And the day before even.

STEVE: Thank you. I'll let everyone go. Have a great week and a great 2022. Continue to test negative and stay positive.

JANE: Steve, this is Jane Hager. I just wanted to thank you again for helping us out with testing for the 300 phones. That was really exciting. That was great feedback. And we're sharing that with tell Teltex. Really valuable input. Thank you very much.

STEVE: Is that device a lower price point than a lot of things you use?

JANE: You know, I can't remember the exact price on it. But I think it's a little bit higher than a lot of the equipment that you would provide. But you know, there hasn't been anything in that capacity out there before. So yeah. It's pretty exciting to see that development.

STEVE: Travis, this was a device that had speakers so that it didn't require a captionist. You could type in to the device, and it would be converted text to speech and go through the speakers so that you could use a regular telephone. Different technology. It was interesting.

TRAVIS: Yep. There were several devices in development, and we're working closely with Gallaudet University, who has a new app called GoVoBo, an ASR but they're working to add text to speech capability to it. It's in concept right now, but I'm very excited about where they're headed with it. They're still working it out, but it is great to hear, yes.

Happy New Year to you. Thank you.

JANE: Thank you all so much. Take care. Have a great day. Bye bye.

STEVE: Thanks, everyone. Goodbye.