

**Vermont Telecommunications Relay Service**  
**Advisory Council Meeting**  
***Draft Meeting Minutes***

Department of Public Service, Zoom Virtual Meeting Space

April 10th, 2024, 10:00a.m. to 12:00p.m.

**Attendees:**

Rene Pellerin, Chair

Hunter Thompson, PSD Director Telecom/Connectivity Division

Aaron Brassard, PSD Fiber Optic Project Manager

Michelle Vicino, Account Manager at T-Mobile for VT Relay Services

Christa Cervantes, Account Manager for Hamilton Relay (VT CapTel)

Pater Johnke, Deputy Director at VCIL and oversee EDP Program

Laura Siegel, Director of Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and DeafBlind Services

Harlie Quero, PSD, Telecommunications Coordinator, (Notetaker)

**Observers:**

Andrew Brenaman, T Mobile Accessibility

Melissa McMahan – Hamilton Relay

**Interpreters:**

Virginia Clark, ASL

Alicia Youngman, ASL,

Janet Dickinson, ASL

**Action Items (Also listed where relevant to specific Discussion):**

<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>Corrections To Previous Minutes</b>	<b>Aaron Brassard/Harlie Quero</b>	<b>4/10/2024</b>
<b>PSD Investigate Representing Vermont in NASRA</b>	<b>Hunter Thompson/Aaron Brassard</b>	<b>4/10/2024</b>
<b>Concerns with cell phone location and DVC</b>	<b>Rene Pellerin/Laura Siegel</b>	<b>4/10/2024</b>
<b>T-Mobile Report</b>	<b>Michelle Vicino</b>	<b>4/10/2024</b>
<b>EDP Report</b>	<b>Peter Johnke</b>	<b>4/10/2024</b>
<b>Hamilton Report</b>	<b>Christa Chaves</b>	<b>4/10/2024</b>

## **Introductions and Call to Order:**

*Call to Order by Rene Pellerin. Meeting Begins at 10:33am.*

## **Old Business:**

### **Previous Meeting Minutes**

*Motion to change meeting minutes.*

*Laura requested names and titles be corrected.*

*Sign name assigned to Harlie.*

*Motion to Approve Previous Minutes*

*Rene made motion to accept.*

*Michelle Accepts, Laura seconded.*

### **Public Service Department as the Vermont Representative in National Association for State Relay Administration, (NASRA).**

*Public Service Department to replace Sunni Eriksen as Vermont NASRA Representative with Hunter Thompson. Follow up needed from Rene.*

### *Questions and Discussion:*

Hunter Thompson: "I am going to defer to Harlie."

Harlie: "No update. I have not received any information or contact from either NASRA or Sunni Eriksen, who is the listed Public Service Department."

Rene: "I have a meeting this afternoon with the FCC. There's a person there representing NASRA. So, I will see if I can get an answer that way. I will let you know."

Andrew: "I may have participated in the past with Sunni. Sunni attended either the National Association State Relay Managers group or there was another conference that was called. State Telecommunication Agency by T-Mobile. And Michelle is nodding yes. One is a national conference, and the other is T-Mobile specific conference. Sunny tends to go to the T-Mobile one. Not the national one. That has been the practice in the past."

Rene: "So those are two different groups. One focuses on equipment distribution, and one focuses on relay services. It is important Vermont be there be represented because there are some hot topics. I've been attending some FCC meetings and there are some states that have shut down their relay services. There state relay services because they felt it wasn't needed any longer. Vermont is still using relay service. So, I think it is very important that we have a representative there to represent our needs."

Andrew: "All states are required to operate per the FCC. None have shut down."

Rene: "But probably the numbers are decreasing around the decline?"

Christa: "What you may be thinking of is there are a couple states not very many but a couple that have discontinued their captioned telephone service. Because it wasn't mandated. But as Andrew said all of the

state relay services are still federally mandated. The traditional TRS relay services have not been shut down anywhere.”

Laura: “I wanted to add to this. I'm also thinking about what happened last year with global BRS. That was the only video remote provider for deaf and blind. It makes me wonder which remote providers are accessible for deaf and blind? Are there any at this point?”

Andrew: “I cannot answer that. Because I'm not in the DRS industry. And not part of that. I'm not covered under those statutes. But possibly someone from the TRS site answer.”

Rene: “I have used global VRS before. And that has been transferred to Sorensen. Sorensen has specific direct line for deaf and blind services. So it is a dedicated line.”

### **Concerns with E911, Direct Video Calling, (DVC), and other software.**

*PSD and Laura must work together to investigate the concerns with software and call disconnections between 911 and TTY users. PSD will invite E911 to the next meeting to discuss dispatch software and procedure behind calls with TTY users.*

Laura: “Renée missed our last meeting. Ashley Happy was invited. She works on educational outreach. She is the coordinator for E911 in that regard. Two of us have met regularly and we continue to hear lots of gaps and disparity with E911. I think some issues are people not realizing how many different telecommunication options there are out there. For people to be able to connect with E911. But Michelle mentioned that no matter which device is being used, you can connect with the E911. The problem that keeps coming up is that not all telecommunication requires people to have to be able to dial E911. Like for example, my videophone you don't need to dial E911 want to call my videophone. Many operators don't understand how that works. So, the calls disconnected. It is tough to connect. So, there are a lot of things that are some gaps and disparities that people are not aware of.”

Laura: “Another thing on the agenda we talked about DVC -- the reason that was brought up was that last summer in July it was recommended the FCC something was going on last summer. Where there were a lot of people signing a petition related to their consigs on relay services replacing DVC, direct video calling. For example, combat where a deaf person if I'm in ASL user rather than calling using a relay service, I can call directly using my videophone. I can call a deaf client directly. Reach somebody who is deaf and they can help solve my issues. So there are concerns out there that that is replacing relay service. But I understand that is no longer an issue.”

### *Questions and Discussion:*

Andrew: “It really was never an issue. There are two different things. It was never an issue. Can you say more? Direct video connection, DVC. Is not the same as TRS. The traditional relay service. They are two very different entities.”

Laura: "Depending on oversight of DVC versus the 911, and their functional equivalents.”

Andrew: “Traditional relay is responsible to respond to 911. So you will have access to the 911 system.”

Laura: “Well lately over the past month I'm still hearing there are complaints out there. People struggling to connect with 911. Which to me I'm really wondering why that would be.”

Michelle: "Like Andrew said TRS and VRS are separate. We do not oversee VRS in the state of Vermont. If someone is using the traditional relay service TRS they have a direct line to 911. We encourage them to dial 911 directly. The capability to communicate with them through the TTY. But DVC -- direct video -- so to me the way you explained it if I were to call customer service directly, I can speak to them directly in sign language. So, like Andrew said, that is separate from TRS. Do you mean DVC to dial 911 directly to speak to 911 ASL? That's why I'm confused here. That would require that 911 operators all know sign language. Correct?"

Laura: "Yes."

Christa: "I think these are separate issues. Andrew, please step in if you have more information. E911 deals with the Public Safety answering point. That is their responsibility to have the technology to make E911 work. Direct video calling is another one where you can call directly. And then there is TRS. I think there are three different things, and they don't intermingle. Traditional relay is strictly for people who are deaf and hard of hearing have speech difficulties. To help facilitate telephone calls. And we are not responsible for the E911 or the direct video calling. Does that clear it up a little bit?"

Laura: "As far as the 911 call center there are two. They have two separate software is. And I notice that the only one the only option if a person is using a TTY and they can easily connect. But there was no option for our TT. So I'm wondering if that is the same as TTY? Would that be considered equal?"

Michelle: "My thought on that one I think RTT is still in the beginning stages. It is not an advanced service yet. It is new. We can get some information on that. But my understanding if someone uses RTT on their phone it automatically converts to if someone was using TTY. I can try to get more information about that."

Rene: "Previously I worked for the state. And I was involved with E911 in the beginning. Establishing that. And they set up software for the TTY. And every call center around the state would have a registration process. The old phone, New England telephone. And then it changed to Verizon or whatever that process has been, was another one of them. It has changed over the years so many times. But anyway, somewhere may be Boston Massachusetts a deaf person there was a volunteer that would do registration and send it out. When a deaf person will call through a TTY there would be information that popped up and said death. They would communicate via the TTY. So now, with all the changes, we have video relay services. In such. And we have direct lines for E911. You can go through an interpreter to 911. Here in Vermont, we have services set up like that. What are your thoughts? In the other comments?"

Hunter: "I've worked with Barb at the E11 -- I'm pretty sure Renée has it correct. I think technology has changed. You're dating yourself with those company names Rene. If you call E911 with a TTY the software at Public Safety answering points will detect that allow you to chat with a E911 dispatcher."

Rene: "I used to train people around the enhanced 911 services. But I've retired so not sure who is doing it now."

Peter: "It was my understand that you can text 911 now."

Laura: "That is one thing that many people are not aware of. They don't know it is available. We are trying to get the word out there. People don't realize that is an option. When I do outreach presentations, I try to add that bit of information. You can text 911. Most people are completely clueless. They have no idea."

Rene: "We did have a presenter from 911 that from their office the came to do a presentation for the deaf community about texting. Setting those messages directly to 911. Several of them tested and they ended

up having the wrong address in the system so that had to be fixed. So, it is important to continue that conversation. And have a representative within the deaf community so they can coordinate that together. You want to maintain that relationship and make sure the addresses are correct and what have you. Deaf and blind community all of the state of Vermont you want to make sure they have access.”

Laura: “I feel like that wraps it up. Thank you for the explanation. Sorry if I cause more confusion for everyone.”

Rene: “We will follow up on this. Hunter Laura we will follow up with E911 and figure out where we can improve things.”

Laura: “That's great. Please let me know, maybe there is a replacement for the current software in the next few years. We just want to make sure that it is running smoothly and there are no issues with that. So, we can make sure we are able to call.”

Rene: “Okay, let me rewind. So, the interpreter can clarify. I think it is important to check how deaf people are registering they are deaf. So that will make sure that E911 can be recognized as a deaf or hard of hearing callers so they will immediately get on the TTY and be able to communicate with the person. It is not an old-fashioned TTY. They have special software. At the call centers. This is the Vermont phone company and their disability center in Massachusetts. I think it is in Marlborough. We can ask Scott Brooks about that. He will be involved in that. Too bad he is not here today but he would have information about that.”

Laura: “So E911 has a form. Unfortunately, nobody knows it is there. To fill it out. To let E911 know they would like to register. I can put a link in the chat.”

Rene: “We have a lot of work to do.”

Laura: “Rene there are still people using TTY. In rural areas. Where there is no high-speed Internet. There are still people using TTY's there. I've met people. I've met individuals who have told me they are still using TTY in those areas. And those are Non signing people. Those are oral folks.”

Rene: “Will have to figure out discussing this with E911 and figure out where we can improve things. And get everything up to date. Are people registered? Do they need training?”

Laura – “Yes. We have been working on that.”

Rene: “Okay, great. Last time I signed up I had a computer software within the system. I think that company no longer makes that software. What do we do now if you're using old technology? And old software. It is important to go through E911 and test the system. Is it accurate and up to date?” (Action Item)

## **New Business:**

### **T- Mobile Update - Michelle Vicino**

Michelle is still doing social media management. Active on both Fakebook and Instagram. She is trying to increase engagement by posting on holidays, examples shown in presentation Valentine's Day. Being selective with what is sent out. She is trying to get better ROI and what they have out there.

Recently went to the Yankee Classic, they go every year. Lots of Hunters are losing their hearing, it was a successful event. We went to the conference of state employees. We were able to give a presentation on RCC. We were able to discuss remote software. Also did HLA meetings.”

Michelle: “Upcoming outreach, there is the Vermont maturity Expo. Also, had been going there in the past. I'm not so sure the ROI is there anymore. So that one we are thinking about that one. And then thanks again to Laura. You are my contact for outreach. Evergreen event is one we are going to look into that one. Everything we do I just have to make sure Jorika is available to go. Some events I can go to. Jerika is the first person I would send out if she's available. If you have any suggestions or if you know of an event even coffee chats and stuff like that. Send it along to me. I would like to make a trip this spring. If there is anything going on I can support the events myself.

Michelle: “So moving on to TRS -- like Renée had mentioned earlier yes TRS is not shutting down. The minutes are declining. The minutes of usage for TRS is declining. That is common across all states. Because people are transitioning from analog phones traditional relay over to VRS IP relay. Things that are Internet-based which is not under the state jurisdiction. So you will see on the slide that the minutes continue to decrease. I'm looking at PowerPoint on my other screen. And then RCC again RCC seems to be all over the place. After COVID we had a big spike in RCC minutes. Remember we had the slowdown on it. I'm trying to ramp up people using RCC again. It is available. They don't know it is available. They don't have to pay for it. It is there and ready for them to use. HLA has been using RCC. That is why I've been joining their calls to help them help facilitate the meeting as far as RCC goes. RCC is not being used that much. If you have anyone who can benefit from using captioning on their virtual calls have them reach out to me let me know who they are. I would be happy to work with them.”

Michelle: “On the next slide, call by type. You will see a majority of the calls still remain to be TTY. That pretty much remains dominate. The BCR invoice calls tend to fluctuate. TTY is the majority of the calls. I can't see the screen for the website. If memory serves me correct the website has remained consistent. The traffic to our website. I'm sorry to Facebook. It remains consistent because we have -- or anything. Our numbers we have we don't have any new followers or anybody. But the numbers for website visits tend to be on the low side because people tend to go to social for updated information. I am able to update social faster than you can do a website. Websites typically have the same information all the time. People don't go back to a website after they know what they are looking for. When they are wanting updates on a service they tend to go to social media. That is why the Facebook numbers look a little low for visitors. People tend to go back to Facebook and Instagram for updated information with our program.

Michelle: “Again, all of our contact information is there. If you have any events or concerns or anybody needs training, reach out to me or Jerika. They can also fill out an online form for a presentation request. We would be happy to go up and train people. This is no charge. We do not charge for the services. It is part of the outreach program. You will see our website and social links that you can refer back to. That's it on my end.”

Rene: “Thank you Michelle”

#### *Question and Discussion on Outreach:*

Laura: “Have I shared my list of different contacts for the Association of \_\_\_?”

Michelle: “You sent me one name. Referred me to one woman. I CCed her and she has not responded to me. If you send me a list of names you did not send that to me. But so one of the things with my job I just

can't reach out to someone and do a cold call. I can't do that. If someone specifically asks to connect to me, I can reach out to them. But you did not give me a list of names. You gave me a list of potential events.”

Laura: “I'm sorry, okay you are right. Okay. I will do that. Those people do outreach communication marketing. With designated agencies. They work with older Vermonters. It might be worth it to connect with them. And they can help us spread the word. About RCC services.”

Michelle: “Absolutely. If these people do outreach, to promote these types of services I can provide a flyer and information, so they have resources to hand out to people they work with.”

Laura: “That would be great.”

*Question and Discussion on, Relay Conference Captioning, (RCC):*

*PSD to provide analysis on RCC usage in the state, including cost.*

Rene: “Thank you Michelle, any questions? Comments? I will add a comment. Talking about RCC, I'm still a bit resistant to it. We are telling people it is free. But it is not actually a relay service. So, I have a concern about that in terms of using TRS funds. To actually pay for RCC. Given it is not a relay service. I want to be transparent about this. I'm resistant to that idea of using those funds for that purpose. The department of public service I think needs to do a little bit more analysis. But I have real concern about that.”

Laura: “For the RCC it is not used in all 50 states. Only as an option. Am I right Michelle?”

Michelle: “That is correct.”

Rene: “Relay services are related to telecommunication services. People being able to access telephone services. So, as I said I just want to state my resistance to the idea of using those funds for RCC.”

Aaron – Sorry I was late everybody. When we renewed the last slowly put the contract out for bid the last time, the Commissioner of the Department of public service wanted the TRS program to be full featured. We interpreted that to mean offering RCC as part of the package. We can consult with the Commissioner and see in the next go round if that should continue to be included. And we will share your concerns with her Rene.”

Rene: “I'm really frustrated and disappointed the department of public service approved it without actual input from the advisory Council. We did not have any -- for 3 years. The bidding process went out without any feedback. We've come to the bid being awarded and RCC is part of it. I would like to see us and be a little bit more discretionary about when RCC should be used. Because if we have to go to the legislature asking for more money to support this I just don't think it is right. That is really what my concern is. And thank you.”

Michelle: “Aaron is right RCC is an added benefit. They wanted a full spectrum of options to offer the deaf and hard of hearing in the state of Vermont. There are people who use RCC, relay conference captioning. You are right it does not use TRS operators. It does allow access for people who are making conference calls over the phone. They have to be virtual. It is over the phone. So, it is giving them another way to have access to their phone calls. And if you recall, I don't know if you noticed but a few years ago we did suspend the service because we hit the cap. It was a big outcry with customers because something

that had grown accustomed to that gave them access to their cause was taken away from them. So, they really rely on RCC.”

Rene: “I don't think it is our fault. I think it is just a misuse of funds for those particular services. That is my point.”

Andrew: This is Andrew. I don't consider it a misuse of services because the PSD recognizes RCC's values valuable tool the deaf and hard of hearing people benefit from using. To access meetings and trainings.”

Rene: “But it is not a relay service. It is not a telephone telecommunications service. It is just not.”

Aaron: “I think I agree with Rene. It is technically not a telecommunication service that it is a service for deaf and hard of hearing Vermonters. I don't exactly know where we could put it if we did not put it in the service. But we can poke around a little.”

Rene: “Thank you Aaron, that would be great.”

### **EDP Report – Pater Johnke**

Peter: “Nick could not make it today. Happy to do this. Short report. For the period January 1st through March 31st. We had 13 applications. Eight of those applications were funded. The other five are expected to be funded shortly. Trying to get some additional information. We have been getting -- from organizations more than individuals. Probably due to some outreach done on time. We did even have little disappointment we did not see a bigger jump in calls. We did have some add on channel 3 that we thought would really make a difference. But unfortunately, it did not. Also, we did do an event at the Accessibility Conference for the state employees. I thought that was very successful. Nick is also going to be doing another outreach in Rutland at a Tech Fair with the deaf, blind and visually impaired. They have some other there is the community day for deaf and blind and hard of hearing people. Looking at that. There are several different pride events going on. We are trying to get the word out there. We are still getting applications coming in. We continue to partner with the Vermont assistive technology project to make sure people are getting the equipment they need. The equipment that works properly for them. Sometimes that involves a lot of back-and-forth and -- from the program. To try stuff out to make sure it is working properly. Tracy at the assistive technology project has been very helpful in that regard. She and I are working on updating the application forms to make them more accessible. So, they would be accessible for [Inaudible] readers and other accessibility enhancements to those forms. And that is it. Short report but if anyone has any questions happy to answer them.”

### *Questions and Discussion:*

Laura: “Not question, just a clarification. I don't know if everybody knows about access Vermont. Which both Peter and Michelle have mentioned. Recently they hosted a full day event with a variety of people tabling there. A full day of workshops related to disability and accessibility and language access and the like. Over 250 state employees attended both face-to-face, in person as well as remotely. \_\_\_\_\_ committee is considering doing a two-day event expanded for state employees with the goal of having more state employees and vendors on the same floor. One negative about this is that Vermont relay and then crowd are separated out from the vendors on the main floor. That we agreed should not be happening. Everyone should be in the same locality. It costs some confusion. If they are not in the same floor. So,



there was some pros and cons. But just wanted to give you a little more context and information. In case some folks were not aware of what that was about.”

Rene – Anything else? No? Thank you, Peter.”

### **Hamilton Relay Report – Christa Cervantes**

Rene: “Sorry for jumping around.”

Christa: “That's okay no problem at all. I did send the PowerPoint out to be included with the meeting invite. I won't take up a lot of your time, but I wanted to let you know that we are answering cap till in Vermont at 100% each month. Everybody is getting answered quickly. And we did not have a lot of calls to customer care regarding the cap till phone. We only have one call in January. And that was regarding set up of the cap till phone. On slide number six I wanted to talk a little bit about what we are doing as far as an outreach availability. We do have virtual outreach events available. Two per year that we can work with Aaron to set up if you would like.” (Action Item)

Christa: “We also do have a Vermont CapTel website. Announcements also get posted to the Hamilton really news and event page on the website. So if you have an interest in looking for the announcements those are on there as well. We do have CapTel marketing materials available to download on that website. And those are available in English and Spanish. If the people in Vermont would like to sign up, they can sign up for the Hamilton relay connector is a seasonal newsletter. It is also available to download off the Hamilton relay website. And, every year Hamilton does what we call a community leader award program. That is statewide recognition and all of the states where we provide a service. For someone who has shown leadership in the deaf community and 24 -- excuse me 2024 nominations are available online and those can be downloaded for that. If you know anyone who is deaf and has done a great job of advocating for their community, being a real community leader -- they could be recognized by Hamilton for their service. And I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have. Or I will turn it back over to Rene.”

### *Questions and Discussion:*

Rene: “Any comments or questions? I do want to ask about the numbers, are they steady? Is there a decline?”

Christa: “For the captioned telephone service the numbers it is kind of funny. They bounce around a lot. So, in July they went up a great deal from excuse me August they went up a great deal from July. And then in September they went down quite a bit. They went back up in October. Down in November and back up in December. For captioned telephone I think it is a it depends on the month and the people that are using it. And how much they are using it. There is not a steady decline in captioned telephone like there has been in TRS. It looks like mountains on the graph.”

Rene: “Interesting. It's not being involved with money then. Comments and Questions?”

### **Conclusion:**

*No feedback or further discussion.*

*Meeting Adjourned.*

**Action Items for July 10<sup>th</sup> 2024:**

<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>Corrections To Previous Minutes</b>	<b>Harlie Quero</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>Follow up on Vermont Representation in NASRA</b>	<b>Hunter Thompson/Rene Pellerin</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>E911 Meeting to Clarify Software Issues with TTY and Dispatch</b>	<b>Hunter Thompson/Laura Siegel</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>Research into how PSAPs connect TTY users with dispatch</b>	<b>Hunter Thompson/Scott Brooks</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>PSD to provide analysis on RCC usage. Discussion with Commissioner.</b>	<b>Hunter Thompson/Aaron Brassard</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>CapTel Outreach – Virtual Events</b>	<b>Christa Chaves/Aaron Brassard</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>T-Mobile Report</b>	<b>Michelle Vicino</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>Hamilton Report</b>	<b>Christa Chaves</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>
<b>EDP Report* May need to go first</b>	<b>Peter Johnke</b>	<b>7/10/2024</b>

**Schedule for remaining 2024 meetings:**

July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024

October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024