

**Minutes for the Meeting of the  
Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay  
Winchester Hall  
Frederick, Maryland  
February 17, 2001**

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**Board Members in Attendance:** Mitch Travers, Al Sonnenstrahl, James Stevenson, Susan Stevens Miller, Gary Manifold, Brenda Battat, Annette Reichman, Susan Boswell, Joy Larson, Rebecca Ladew.

**Absent Board Members:** Patsy Bowman, Isaac Agboola

**TAM Staff:** Gilbert Becker, Maggie Griffiths, Pam Stewart, Nancy Seidman, Willis Mann.

**Interpreters:** Liz Mohr, Jeff Kirkwood, Mark Rust

**Sprint:** Randy Murbach

#### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The meeting was called to order at 9:15 a.m. Mitch Travers introduced the four new members of the board: Brenda Battat, who represents senior citizens and is also a member of the SHHH; Annette Reichman, who represents the deaf population; Susan Boswell who represents hard of hearing persons, and Gary Manifold, who represents mobility disabled persons.

#### **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Correction: Becky Ladew was not recorded as absent from the previous meeting. The minutes were accepted as corrected.

#### **TAM STAFF REPORTS**

##### **Willis Mann**

Board Vacancies: The four existing vacancies have now been filled, but four other Board members are approaching the end of their terms and they should let the Governor's office know if they want to seek reappointment.

Relay Millionaire: While attendance at the Relay Millionaire shows has not been as good as we would like, those who do show up usually report being impressed by how much they were able to learn about the relay from the event.

Business Cards for Board Members: Board members should be getting their new business cards soon.

##### **Pam Stewart**

711 vs 800-number Study: As requested, a study is being conducted to compare response times and other metrics between the 711 and 800-number access lines. An independent vendor will perform the study. Hopefully a report will be ready in time for the next meeting. A quality assurance study

will also be conducted as part of the effort to ensure that Maryland Relay maintains its position as a leader among relay providers in the nation.

At the request of Willis Mann, Pam Stewart explained that there is no truth to the rumor going around that using 711 would cost consumers more than using the 800-number. Apparently some consumers are confusing costs that are really associated with their local exchange carriers with 711 costs. Maryland Relay users will be provided factual information about this matter through the relay newsletter and other means.

Mitch Travers asked for the exact objectives of the 711/800 access study. Pam Stewart responded that the project would include a call routing study covering various parts of the state and external centers and a comparative study of the response times between 711 and 800 numbers. The end result would include statistical analysis comparing the two access methods. Mitch Travers stressed the need for the sampling to be scientific in order not to compromise the data analysis and, subsequently, the report itself.

Al Sonnenstrahl expressed appreciation for the scope of the survey, which he said went beyond his initial motion on this issue. He asked if, due to proprietary concerns, any parts of the report would be held back from Board review. Pam Stewart promised to give Board members copies of the report when completed.

In response to a question from Mitch Travers about the survey sample size, Pam Stewart said it should be around 500 and it would be primarily random but may include handpicked locations. Al Sonnenstrahl requested to see the proposed survey question so the Board could provide input. Pam Stewart promised to distribute the forms via e-mail.

Susan Miller clarified that the term "central office" in the context of telephone switching, refers not to an office as generally understood but to switching equipment placed in strategic locations.

### **Nancy Seidman**

Nancy Seidman provided an overview of the role of public relations in Maryland Relay and a review of recent publicity efforts for the benefit of the new Board members. Recent and ongoing public relations efforts include:

- Maryland Relay Newsletter, which is published twice a year. There is still time for Board members to contribute articles and other information.
- Educational Kit with a Maryland Relay theme for use in Maryland schools. The kit includes information and activities designed to promote greater awareness of deafness, deaf culture, and telecommunications technology. The kit is currently being pilot-tested in five counties, and preliminary feedback has been very good.
- Presentations to various groups such as senior citizens.

In response to a question from Al Sonnenstrahl, Nancy Seidman reaffirmed that presentations typically include introduction to TTYs and how to recognize TTY tones.

Jim Stevenson led a round of applause for Nancy Seidman and TAM for their work on the educational kit. Brenda Battat said some people from her chapter might be interested to volunteer to assist TAM with its outreach efforts, including the educational kit program.

**Maggie Griffith** (*for Brenda Kelly-Frey*)

Updating Board Members' Information: A form was provided on which Board members could indicate corrections to their names and e-mail addresses.

MAT Program Update: Outreach efforts to publicize the MAT program continues. A report showing more detailed breakdown of equipments distributed since the inception of the program by specific categories (such as type of disability, county, etc.) was provided to the Board, as requested at the previous meeting.

Al Sonnenstrahl asked for data about applications that were denied. Maggie Griffiths responded that a similarly detailed report showing denials was not available but that approximately 227 applications are either denied or awaiting further action.

Brenda Battat asked how the MAT office would know that an applicant really has a disability. Maggie Griffiths replied that in addition to self-report on the form, a doctor's certification is required. Gilbert Becker confirmed, in response to an inquiry by Ms. Battat, that an individual could receive more than one piece of equipment, depending on the need.

Al Sonnenstrahl asked if there exists a good estimate of how many deaf-blind people live in Maryland in order to determine if the MAT program did not reach many eligible deaf-blind persons. Joy Larson responded that her educated guess is there are less than 100, but that she was not sure. Gil Becker said that some people might be missed because the program is generally targeted at individuals who are on programs such as SSI, SSDI, and AFDC. Al Sonnenstrahl also inquired whether paging devices and caller identification devices could be added to the list of MAT equipments. Gil Becker responded that the program is currently mandated to distribute equipment, not service, so pagers and caller identification devices would not qualify under the current rules.

**Gil Becker**

Consumer Advisory Board: Board members are welcomed to provide input to the FCC's Consumer Advisory Board for Telecommunications for Persons with Disabilities through Gil Becker or Brenda Battat, who are members of that board.

Two-Line VCO: In response to consumers demand, Maryland Relay has acquired a dedicated toll-free access number for the two-line VCO feature. Some important issues, such as the order of answer (e.g., voice first, TTY first) have not yet been resolved and input in this regard is welcomed from interested consumers.

Establishing a dedicated toll-free two-line VCO access number should significantly decrease set-up time and allow for smoother call processing as opposed to the current cumbersome and timely set-up. Unfortunately, Sprint has informed the State that it does not have the resources or the desire to put this feature on their platform at the present time. Sprint explained that they have other priorities and Maryland's request was not at the top of this list. Sprint has offered to provide an LOE (Level

of Effort) by the end of the second quarter of 2001 and let the State know how much it would cost to implement this service with all the features required to make this a worthwhile product on Sprint's platform.

There followed a lengthy discussion about the technical and procedural aspects of using two-line VCO. Several Board members complained that Sprint and TAM have not been very responsive to consumers' demands in this area, and others complained about the quality of the product and the length of setup time. Randy Murbach noted that the need to meet new FCC regulations has made it necessary to reprioritize some product developments.

Displaying Calling Numbers on Caller-ID: Due primarily to technological and procedural constraints, Sprint has not yet implemented the calling number pass through feature, but they are working on it. A lengthy discussion about the constraints followed, with several Board members and TAM staff suggesting that the feature should not be permanently installed until certain legal and procedural issues associated with call blocking have been resolved.

## **PUBLIC INPUT**

### **Mary Lynn Lally (Walkersville)**

Ms. Lally reported that when she tries to access the relay using the 711 number, it seems to take forever before there is a response.

### **Marcia Kolander (Frederick)**

Ms. Kolander said she and her husband use the Relay and that her husband generally uses the 800 number. She said she is generally satisfied with the Relay.

### **Janie Pearson**

Ms. Pearson reported that she visits Texas fairly often and that the response there was generally faster than Maryland Relay's.

Mitch Travers showed e-mail addresses that the public could use to contact the Board, TAM, or Sprint.

### **Robert Lewis (Frederick)**

Mr. Lewis shared his experience as a regular user of the Texas video relay service, which he used to access through the Internet using special software and high-speed connection while living in Texas. He said in his experience, making calls this way has proven to be much better and faster than through TTY. He described the process of connection in detail, including the type of equipment and software he uses. He advocated that Maryland should offer video relay service on a permanent basis.

## **BOARD MEMBERS REPORTS**

### **Jim Stevenson**

Grants and Proposals: The Board of Education in Allegheny County has recently won several grants that made it possible, among other things, to install information kiosk with touch screen in public locations and public service agencies throughout the county. These kiosks would provide the general public with information about the relay. Grants have also make possible an after school program that links students virtually across counties. That program currently links students in Allegheny and St. Mary's counties and it is proposed to focus on relay information at during future virtual linkup between the two counties.

### **Al Sonnenstrahl**

Relay Millionaire Shows: Al Sonnenstrahl reported that he has attended several game shows. While the shows have been extensively advertised and well presented, attendance has not lived up to expectations and it is not exactly clear why this is the case. Someone offered to help spread the word through e-mail.

Interrupting During Calls: Al Sonnenstrahl reported that, in his experience, many relay operators still do not seem to be familiar with using the interrupt feature, causing him and the operators to unnecessarily waste valuable time during calls when the feature could have cut down on the time spent on calls. He also observed that many consumers do not seem to be aware that they could now interrupt or know how to do so. Randy Murbach suggested to take down the numbers of the operators who appear unfamiliar with using the interrupt feature.

### **Rebecca Ladew**

Speech-to-Speech: The FCC has mandated that all states provide STS, as well as other relay services, by March 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. Sprint is the provider of STS in 26 states, followed by AT&T, which provides STS in 12 states, including Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Several states have other providers. Twelve states do not have a dial-in number for STS as yet.

### **Joy Larson**

Small Number of Deaf-Blind Callers: Joy Larson said it is possible that some calls by consumers properly classified as deaf-blind users are not showing up in the monthly call volume statistics because an informal poll of deaf-blind persons indicate that many do use the relay to place calls. Perhaps the method and/or equipment they use do not identify them as deaf-blind. For instance, some may need only large-type display to make relay calls, which would not show up in the statistics. Pam Stewart expressed agreement that calls by deaf-blind consumers could be getting undercounted for these reasons.

### **Brenda Battat**

Ms. Battat said she is pleased to be serving on the Board and promised to actively seek user input through her organization's chapter meetings and activities.

### **Gary Manifold**

Mr. Manifold introduced himself. He said he did not have anything to report as yet.

### **Annette Richman**

Ms. Reichman introduced herself, mentioning her extensive experience working closely with relay services in Arizona and North Carolina. In North Carolina, she was actively involved in the video

relay service trial, training the interpreters. She shared some of the insights she gained from the experience.

**Susan Boswell**

Ms. Boswell introduced herself and said she is a regular user of two-line VCO. She reported that her experience with the VCO service has been very positive.

**SPRINT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT**

**Randy Murbach**

Consumer Complaints Data: The Board reviewed the latest consumer complaint data provided by Sprint. The FCC has introduced a new format for customer contact service and that format will be used to report complaints henceforth. The current report shows 16 complaints and 12 commendations by Maryland consumers.

Relay Millionaire Show: Randy Murbach gave a demonstration of the Relay Millionaire show. Five shows have been completed so far, with nine more to go. Some of the upcoming shows are in areas with a large population of deaf people, so hopefully attendance would reflect that. There is considerable interest in the show by other states and the right to copy the show's format may be sold to other states with the proceeds going to Maryland Relay.

Customer Database: To promote the use of the customer database service, consumers will be rewarded with a 15-minute prepaid phone card for filling out and returning the customer database form, which will be sent via direct mail to Maryland relay users. The form may also be downloaded from the Maryland Relay website.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for May 12<sup>th</sup> in Solomons Island.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.