

MINUTES OF NEBRASKA TRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: January 24, 2025, 1 pm CDT

Location: Nebraska Public Service Commission

300 The Atrium, 1200 N Street (Commission Hearing Room), Lincoln Nebraska

1. **Roll Call/Introductions.** The Nebraska Telecommunications Relay Advisory Committee met on January 24, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. at the Public Service Commission hearing room.

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Tami Richardson-Nelson. Present from the committee were Tami Richardson-Nelson (Chair); Norm Weverka (Vice-Chair); Robert Feit; Commissioner Tim Schram and John Wyvill.

Introductions: Present from the Commission, Cullen Robbins, Director of Communications, Brett Bode, TRS/NSTEP Program Manager, Jonathan Smith, Attorney representing legal support for TRS issues for the Commission (joining remotely), Justin Williamson, Policy Analyst and Technical Assistant; Representing NCDHH were Kim Davis (Interim Director), and Kyle Miers (incoming Executive Director); Representing Hamilton, Allison LaBrie, Account Manager, Beth Slough, Director of Account Management and Compliance Manager, Jim Ediger, Chief Legal Officer; Karen Weverka member of the public; Sharon Sinkler and Margie Propp interpreted the meeting.

2. **Election of New Officers – Chairperson and Vice Chairperson.** Current Officers are Tami Richardson-Nelson (Chair) and Norm Weverka (Vice-Chair). Motion by Robert Feit to nominate Tami Richardson-Nelson as Chair, to cease nominations and to poll the committee for the vote. Seconded by Commissioner Tim Schram. Motion approved by all members present.

Motion by Robert Feit to nominate Norm Weverka as Vice-Chair, to cease nominations and poll the committee for the vote. Seconded by John Wyvill. Motion approved by all members present.

3. **Approval of the Agenda.** Motion by Robert Feit to approve the agenda as presented. Seconded by Norm Weverka. Agenda approved by all other members present.

4. **Approval of the Minutes of the January 27, 2024, Meeting.** Motion by Norm Weverka to approve the minutes of the January 27, 2024, meeting as presented. Seconded by Robert Feit. John Wyvill abstaining from voting due to not being part of the Committee in 2024. Minutes approved as presented by all members present.

5. **Chairperson's/Vice-Chairperson's Comments:** Tami welcomes Brett to the Committee. Also Welcomes the new director for NCDHH, Kyle Miers, exciting for him to start on Feb. 18th, and appreciate him joining us from Australia this morning.

Norm feels requirement adjustments on reapplication frequency and allowing two residents at a single address are both good adjustments to our program. Glad to be here.

6. **Hamilton Relay Accessibility Comments:**

- 1) Introduction to Hamilton Relay, by Beth Slough. Provides a brief introduction of Hamilton along with introducing Allison LaBrie and Jim Ediger
- 2) Hamilton Presentation on Recent Activities and Outreach Plans for 2024-25 fiscal year. Allison LaBrie presented a PowerPoint presentation on relay activities, relay center traffic and outreach for 2024-25.
- 3) Discussion after presentation: Discussion about contacts from Husker Harvest Days. Also, some questions about if training on how to use the equipment is provided.

Commissioner Tim Schram questions on how many states Hamilton supports. Beth Slough outlined that Hamilton supports 35 states. Tim also raised a question on the trends of CapTel use declining. Discussion of the FCC goal to eliminate Copper networks and impacts it will have on TRS and CapTel services.

Tami raises discussion about the mechanics of the Vendor change because of the RFP approval in early 2024. Cullen provides details on the TRS Contract process with 5-year contracts and RFP process. Beth Slough providing support of TRS services and impacts of the conversion of analog to digital phone lines. Tami asks about outreach plans related to TRS support. Beth clarifies current support per TRS contract and offers some opportunity to partner for other outreach opportunities.

Kim Davis comments on the outreach NCDHH has done at locations like Husker Harvest Days.

Norm commented that he was not aware of a vendor change and would like to see greater communication of vendor changes. Norm also encourages outreach helps with awareness of the program and the help it provides.

John offers as a comment for the incoming NCDHH director that there continues to be room for additional outreach efforts.

Bob provided a request for clearer TRS headings in the presentation. Bob then provided some history of outreach efficiency.

Kyle indicates that outreach will review current and plans for advocacy of from the NCDHH. Kim speaks to current advocacy efforts and the support of the NSTEP equipment program use. Kim also touches on the improvement of broadband access in NE and how that is helping with access in previously underserved areas.

Tim provides details on broadband improvements related to the different broadband funds. Comments on PSC presence at Husker Harvest days and will consider providing more TRS information in the future.

Tami closes comments but asks for increased communication with the TRS Advisory Committee on future RFP actions.

7. **Public Service Commission Comments:**

- a) Update on Text-to-911 Implementation in Nebraska (Director, Cullen Robbins). Cullen provided an update on behalf of 911 Department Director Dave Sankey. Cullen gave an update on Text-to-911 in Nebraska. A handout map of counties that have implemented Text-to-911 is provided

Norm raises question about differences between last years updates compared to the current map. It appears nice progress made in middle of the state, but some question around NE corner.

Tami raises question about the impacts to 911 and tracking when outages occur. Are there any reports tied to support of Text to 911 impacts when outages occur? Tim provided summary of actions PSC has taken in investigations of 911 outages.

- b&c) Updated Relay Statistics/NSTEP Program (Brett Bode); Brett provided a handout of a financial tracking for TRS support and our NSTEP equipment program. This covered fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25. Forecasts are built to include the 2025-26 fiscal year and models two different rate surcharge options at, \$0.05 and \$0.04. Brett provides his recommendation of moving surcharge rate to \$0.04 for the next fiscal year.

Tim asks for the current fund balance and current monthly expense estimate. The current fund balance of \$389, 211 as of December 31, 2024, is provided. A monthly average expense of \$77,777 is provided along with explanation of prior months being lower due to no Verizon related expenses being redeemed. Tim asks about the change in monthly remittance revenue monthly with a change of \$0.01, Brett provided the estimate that a \$0.01 cent change results in a roughly \$20,000 revenue shift.

Norm asks about last time Verizon expense was received and concern of ability of the fund to cover a large bill. Brett provides history of Verizon charges since his start with the PSC in May. For 2024 Verizon has been consistent with monthly invoicing, but that stalled with holidays starting in November.

Tim asks for how many months behind we are now. Brett explains we are currently behind for November and December but also have January due in February. Also asked, for the total spend in 2024 for Verizon expenses. Brett will follow up with those details after the meeting.

Brett references the graph of NSTEP Application Quantities and points to a steady trend of applications. There was an uptick in applications in August after the change in requirements, but after that initial month volumes have returned to normal levels.

Bob comments about the trending of application amounts with the August spike and December downturn. Brett comments on consistency of the trending.

Tami questions the legislative bill thinking changes were going to be specific to wireless devices only at 3yrs and thinks that Signaling equipment should remain at 5-year terms. She doesn't want to see people getting new equipment if it is not needed just because they can due to the term length being shorter. Cullen clarifies that the statues speak only of specialized equipment and do not differentiate between cell phones and other types of equipment. So, when the statute changed, it impacted all the equipment. He offers that 90% of overall applications are for wireless devices. Brett will provide further reporting breakdown of the application by equipment type.

d) Legislative Summary (Director, Cullen Robbins).

LB4 – Telecommunication Exchange Deregulation Act – this bill will make it easier for carriers to be relieved from the obligation of having to service all customers in their area as a carrier of last resort. There is limited chance of impact to the TRS customers.

LB346 – Termination of Boards/Committees/etc. – this bill is intended to eliminate unneeded or obsolete boards and committees. The TRS committee is not included in the list being reviewed and it should mean no impact to the TRS committee.

General discussion of the bills.

e) Broadband updates (Director, Cullen Robbins)

Broadband Bridge and Capital Funds Project – both programs help distribute funds to improve broadband access. Broadband bridge has impacted 18,000 homes and the Capital Fund Project has impacted 10,000 homes

The Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, administered by the Nebraska Broadband Office, is tasked with getting broadband to all remaining unserved NE residents.

Director Dave Sankey joined the call, and we revisited the Text to 911 questions.

f) Determination of Surcharge for July 1, 2025.

Brett provides his recommendation that starting July 1, 2025, the TRS surcharge rate should be reduced to \$0.04. Bob comments that he is ok with a surcharge rate of \$0.04.

Tami asks what happens if we find that the fund balance runs out? Cullen outlines we would convene the TRS board and consider asking for additional funding so NSTEP could continue to operate. Brett clarifies that his recommendation does incorporate reserve calculations like what Steve has used historically to cover up to 3 months' worth of expenses.

Bob and Norm both comment they are ok with the \$0.04 rate. Norm Weverka makes a motion to recommend the Commission adjust the surcharge to \$0.04. John Wyvill seconded the motion. Motion is unanimously approved. Tami requests that a letter of recommendation is drafted and provided so Tami can sign it and it can be provided to the PSC as the Committee's recommendation.

8. **Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Comments.** Kim Davis provided an update for NCDHH to the committee. Kim outlined the successful conclusion of the search for a new Executive Director. Kyle Miers will start as the new director on Feb 18th, 2025. The NCDHH board last met on December 13th, 2024.

Advisory Committee Members Terms – Appointments/New Appointments Needed.

- Commissioner Tim Schram and Tami Richardson-Nelson were reappointed December 13th, 2024, and are serving a three-year term December 13, 2024 – December 13, 2027.
- John Wyvill was appointed to represent the public (Position previously held by Annette Campbell). Three-year term beginning December 13, 2024 – December 13, 2027.
- There are now two (2) vacancies on this committee – 1) one position representing speech-disabled individuals and 2) one representing the telephone industry.

9. **Old Business:** No old business to review

10. **New Business:**

Tim thanks everyone who serves on the board, their service is appreciated.

11. **Public Comment:** None provided.

12. **Next Meeting:** Meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m. by Tami Richardson-Nelson. Next meeting to be scheduled later.

Respectfully submitted,

Brett Bode

January 28, 2025.