



**EDUCATION and WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CABINET**  
**Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

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**M E M O R A N D U M**

**DATE:** July 1, 2020

**TO:** Jay D. Hartz, Director  
Legislative Research Commission

**CC:** Jacqueline Coleman, Lieutenant Governor/Secretary  
Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Michael J. Schmitt, Chairman  
Public Service Commission

**FROM:** Virginia L. Moore, Executive Director  
Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 

**RE:** Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2019-2020

Per KRS 163.527, the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) Annual Report for the fiscal year (FY) 2019 - 2020 is to be submitted to the Kentucky General Assembly through the Legislative Research Commission on July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year the program is in operation.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [Virginia.moore@ky.gov](mailto:Virginia.moore@ky.gov) or at 502-573-2604.

## The Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Since its inception in 1995, the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP), administered by the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), has strived to serve the almost 700,000 deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech impaired consumers in Kentucky (17% of the population) that apply for specialized telecommunications equipment. From time to time, we receive letters of thanks from grateful recipients. Below are some of the excerpts from FY 19-20.

“I feel proud that our state has this kind of service.”

(Hard of hearing senior – Lexington)

“My sister was the first one I called today, and she was so happy she cried, which made me ‘happy-cry’, too.”

(Severely hard of hearing senior – Prestonsburg)

“Our speech impaired clients are doing extremely well! Their families and our team of Speech Pathologists are very grateful. What a wonderful program...life changing for sure!”

(Speech-language pathologist – Louisville)

“I have received my iPhone and am very grateful”

(Hard of hearing senior – Owensboro)

“Thanks for all you’ve done. I really appreciate your help in the middle of this pandemic.”

(Daughter of a severely hard of hearing cancer patient – Rockfield)

My Serene signaler alarm [part of the telecommunications phone system] saved my life! The electric went out at my house about 2:00 in the afternoon, and I went to bed around 8:00. The generator was on because the electric was still off. I couldn’t go to sleep because something didn’t feel right, and the pager kept going off. The fire department told me later that if I didn’t have that signaler, I would have died from all the carbon monoxide coming in through my basement vents.”

(Severely hard of hearing senior – Lexington)

**Telecommunications Access Program  
Annual Report  
Fiscal Year 2019 - 2020**

**Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
Virginia L. Moore, Executive Director**

In compliance with KRS 163.527, this annual report is submitted to the Kentucky General Assembly through the Legislative Research Commission.

“The Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shall provide to the General Assembly an annual report on the operation of the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP). The report shall be due on July 1 of each year, beginning July 1, 1995, and, at a minimum, provide:

- The number of persons served and the number of TDDs (*equipment*) distributed;
- The revenues and expenditures of the program;
- Discussion of any major policy or operational issues;
- Any changes the Commission plans to make in the program that does not require legislative action; and
- Any proposals for legislative changes in the program.”

**The number of persons served and STE distributed:**

The Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) processed **895** applications during FY20 and provided 743 pieces of equipment to eligible applicants. Statuses of all applications for Specialized Telecommunication Equipment (STE) as of 7/1/2020, are as follows:

Status	Total
Approved	245
Complete	489
Incomplete	80
Denied	79
Ready for Review	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>895</b>

**895** consumers were served and **743** pieces of equipment were distributed to eligible applicants during FY20. Consumers that received equipment, broken down by degree of hearing/speech loss, are listed below:

Degree of Hearing Loss	Total
Deaf	107
Deaf w/ Limited Vision/Deaf Blind	10
Hard of Hearing w/ Limited Vision	11
Hard-of-Hearing	226
Late-Deafened	1
Severely Hard-of-Hearing	15
Speech-Impaired	119
<b>Total</b>	<b>489</b>

The Public Service Commission (PSC) collects funds for TAP and the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) through a small surcharge on all telecommunication access lines. The PSC distributes those funds as appropriated to KCDHH to administer the TAP and to the state contracted relay provider (Hamilton Telecommunications, Inc.) to administer TRS within the state.

During FY 19-20, the iPhone and iPad continue to be the most popular devices, as the mobile technology meets the broadening communication needs of consumers who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired. Text messaging is the norm for most consumers with a hearing loss, and according to the 2017 *Journal on Technology and Persons with Disabilities*, 91% of the nation's disabled population utilizes wireless devices as their primary source of telecommunication. For many in this vulnerable population, these devices, which are preloaded with specialized telecommunications apps, are essential during an emergency. During the COVID-19 pandemic, necessary precautions prescribed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including "healthy at home" and social distancing, make these telecommunications devices even more important, as they provide access to vital information as well as communication. Social distancing makes it harder to hear and read lips, and standard masks make lip-reading impossible, so the speech to text app can be very helpful. When activated, the app will caption any speech detected by the device's existing microphone. Apps such as FaceTime allow users to see each other, helping to overcome feelings of isolation and other issues associated with quarantining and social distancing. This and other apps providing face-to-face communication allow users to read lips and communicate using sign language as well. Amplified and captioned phones have also proved to be particularly beneficial in keeping families in

contact with each other, providing access to necessary services, and reducing the sense of isolation during this difficult time, especially for seniors who live alone or in nursing homes. In addition, specialized signaling devices notify consumers of incoming calls and provide the added benefit of connecting with smoke/CO2 detectors for home safety.

The number of TAP applicants typically decreases during the holiday months, but those numbers usually rebound shortly after the beginning of the calendar year. Unfortunately, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a deviation in this trend, and the number of applicants has remained lower than normal. This was due in part to the difficulty in getting the Professional Certification portion of the application signed by professionals such as audiologists, hearing instrument specialists, and physicians, whose businesses were temporarily closed or severely limited during the state of emergency. Outreach efforts were also restricted, resulting in a decrease in activity. We anticipate requests for equipment and outreach opportunities will increase significantly as emergency restrictions ease and businesses reopen. In order to increase agency efficiency and accessibility and provide improved customer service through a more efficient delivery system, funds were allocated to the development of a robust database. This investment necessitated the creation of a waiting list for applicants who were approved to receive equipment; however, the long-term benefits for our consumers outweighs the short-term delays in equipment distribution.

FY 19-20 has been a time of technological progress for many 911 services in the Commonwealth with the incorporation of services such as Smart911 and text to 911 in several counties, which has led to increased access for their residents. Unfortunately, efficient and affordable broadband services continues to be a barrier to utilizing specialized equipment in rural areas, and we are deeply concerned for consumers' safety, as these individuals have no means of contacting emergency services outside their homes. We continue to work with emergency 911 services to provide support in the form of information, education, and advocacy to improve this disparity and make services accessible to everyone, regardless of their geographical location within the Commonwealth.

### **Public Relations:**

Television advertisements by Hamilton Relay, our state TRS provider, run twice a year showcasing captioned telephones. These advertisements always increase the number of applications for that device. Hamilton Relay continues to partner with us to provide state outreaches and trainings for devices utilizing the relay service. Partnership events and word of mouth from professionals and other applicants provide us with additional application requests. We reach out to professionals that serve our population on a regular basis to keep them apprised of the resources we offer to improve communication for deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired Kentuckians. During FY 19-20 we noted an increase in applications from a particular population, specifically seniors with a vision loss as well as a hearing loss. This increase reflects the aging of America, reinforcing the fact that TAP provides a vital service.

During FY 19-20, staff members attended numerous events to promote the TAP, including the following:

- Community and Senior Health Fairs, statewide
- Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) meetings
- Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EDHI) Advisory Board/Conference
- First Steps / Hands Alive events
- Hands & Voices, Kentucky chapter meetings
- Health and Medical Preparedness Advisory Committee meeting

Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), Kentucky chapter meetings  
 HLAA, national conference  
 Infant & Toddler Institute on Deafness Conference  
 Kentucky Academy of Audiology Conference  
 Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation (KATLC) quarterly meetings  
 Kentucky Association of the Deaf (KAD) conference  
 Kentucky Emergency Management meetings  
 Kentucky Emergency Services Conference (KESC)  
 Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD) Alumni Association events  
 Kentucky Speech Language Hearing Association (KSHA) Convention  
 Kiwanis Club of Frankfort meeting  
 Mental Health Advisory Board quarterly meetings  
 National Association of State Administrators for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASDHH)  
 National Association of State Relay Service Administrators (NASRA) Conference  
 National Hands & Voices Leadership Conference  
 National Law Enforcement Training Program development meetings  
 Parent Café  
 Senior Celebration hosted by the Lincoln Trail Area District Development  
 Senior Citizen Association meetings, statewide  
 Statewide Advisory Council for Exceptional Children meetings  
 Telecommunication Relay Services (TRS) Advisory Council meetings  
 Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Administrators (TEDPA) Conference  
 University of KY Retiree Resources for Successful Living event

The grid below depicts the public relations methods utilized to advertise the TAP. These numbers are analyzed each FY and the methods adjusted accordingly to ensure the agency uses the most effective means of advertising based on the trends noted in the previous FY. PR numbers increased significantly as a result of the exposure generated by the Executive Director's ongoing commitment to interpreting the Governor's press briefings. There has also been an increase in referrals by friends/family.

<b>TAP Counts</b>												
<b>Final Quarter Count</b>												
<b>A Statistical Analysis to Help Determine Best Methods of Advertising</b>												
<b>How did they hear about the TAP Program?</b>												
	Applied before	TV Ad	Billboard	Radio	Outreach	A friend	Web site	Newsletter	Facebook	Referral	Other	TOTAL
QTD*	49	0	0	0	3	15	5	1	0	13	24	110
*FQC: "Final Quarter Count" - These final counts are for the quarter, April 1, 2020 to June 30, 2020												
<b><i>This email was automatically generated by the Web server on Wednesday - July 01, 2020 12:01 AM EDT INBOX NOT MONITORED - DO NOT REPLY</i></b>												

**Revenues and Expenditures of the Telecommunications Access Program  
For fiscal year 2020 – 2021**

<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>Budgeted Expenditures</b>	<b>Actual Expenditures</b>
<b>FY 2020– 21 Allotment</b>	1,179,700	1,179,700
Total Revenue collected	1,179,700	1,179,700
<b>PERSONNEL EXPENSES</b>		
State Employee Salary	185,000	169,099
State Employee Benefits	175,800	187,042
Other Personnel Services	91,100	89,609
Other	0	212,031
<b>Total Personnel Services</b>	<b>451,900</b>	<b>657,781</b>
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>		
Utilities	5,400	962
Other Rentals	36,000	535
Maintenance and Repairs	0	0
Postage Services	5,500	2,208
Miscellaneous Services	24,000	11,499
Telecommunications	8,500	711
Computer Services	22,000	1,981
Supplies	12,400	3,773
TAP Commodities	2,600	0
TAP Equipment Purchases	553,200	482,797
Travel Expense/ Allowances	20,700	13,264
Miscellaneous Commodities	36,500	4,189
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>727,800</b>	<b>521,919</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>1,179,700</b>	<b>1,179,700</b>
<b>13-33-340-TB00 BALANCE</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## Discussion of any major policy or operational issues:

As KCDHH is the only centralized, non-biased source of information regarding issues related to hearing loss, our ability to provide information, referrals, and advocacy, as well as specialized telecommunications equipment for the citizens of the Commonwealth is an essential service to the general public. TAP staff strives to provide the most technologically advanced telecommunications equipment possible to serve our constituents transitioning communication needs. The TAP is committed to improving the quality of life for the deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired citizens throughout the Commonwealth.

The Executive Director and TAP staff attended the Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA) Conference in Phoenix, Arizona in the fall of 2019 to gather information on new and emerging technology for the spring 2020 Request for Bids (RFB). TAP RFBs were submitted; however, due to the impacts of COVID-19 on state government, there may be a processing delay.



TAP staff utilizes a host of different methods and media including vlogs, videoconferencing, video relay interpreting, FaceTime, instant messaging, text messaging, interpreters, and email, as well as traditional telephone, USPS, and face-to-face interaction to promote the program and answer questions from consumers and professionals. TAP staff also works internally with agency PR staff to coordinate and provide outreach. Since in-home equipment installations are currently prohibited due to COVID-19 safety precautions, TAP staff is working with vendors to develop additional training videos as well as equipment-specific tutorials that can be posted on the KCDHH website.

Staff members serve on a variety of boards related to assistive technology in addition to serving on emergency notification teams to represent KCDHH in the state's efforts to bring NG911 to fruition and make wireless communication in emergencies a reality. Public Service Answering Points (PSAP) must be fully accessible, and text messaging is the most logical answer to that requirement, not only for our consumers but also for hearing individuals that use mobile devices.

The TAP Advisory Board, which consists of consumers, agency oversight representatives, and TAP staff, meets at least once annually. During the fall 2019 meeting, discussion focused primarily on new equipment and technology, since TAP staff had recently attended the TEDPA Conference. Members were asked for equipment recommendations in preparation for submitting RFBs in spring 2020. The Board was also notified that KCDHH will be transitioning to a new database, which is currently under development. The April 2020 meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19 safety precautions.



**TAP Advisory Board Members**

<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Membership Status</b>	<b>Term Ends</b>
Gordon-Brown	Gerry	*KCDHH Commissioner/Advisory Board Chair	2021
Ziehr	Jeremiah	*Deaf Consumer	2021
Fowler	Lewis	*Deaf Consumer	2023
Lawson	Johnny	*Speech-Impaired Consumer	2021
Fenwick	Marilyn	*Hard of Hearing Consumer	2023
McGirt	Melinda	*Hard of Hearing Consumer	2023
Timon	James	*Hard of Hearing Consumer	2021
Stevens	Jim	**Public Service Commission Representative	Law
Taylor	Jeannie	**KCDHH Commission Chair	Law
Campbell	Tyler	*KY Telephone Association Representative	Law
Moore	Virginia	**KCDHH Executive Director	Law
Endler-Smith	Jessica	***Administrative Specialist II	Staff
Stinson	Toni Jo	***Document Processing Specialist I	Staff
Crowe	Tashina	***Interpreter I	Staff

*\*voting members    \*\*non-voting members, serve by law or ex-officio    \*\*\*TAP staff*

The agency is currently interviewing potential candidates to replace the recently retired Program Coordinator. In the meantime, TAP staff has continued to attend meetings to promote TAP and train consumers on equipment and policy changes. As part of that mission, the Administrative Specialist II applied for and was elected to serve on the Kentucky Assistive Technology Service (KATS) Network Advisory Board as of March 2020.

**Plans for FY 21, not involving Legislative changes include:**

TAP is administered per KRS 163.525 and continues to grow as demand increases and technology changes to meet the needs of communication access. The selected device(s) provide affordable, portable, reliable, and accessible telecommunications for all eligible applicants.

As previously mentioned, KCDHH has been working closely with a database development team to develop a new database capable of handling the anticipated increase in applicants and outreach opportunities in the wake of COVID-19. The database is designed to increase agency efficiency and customer service through accessibility features such as the web-based portal through which consumers will be able to track the status of their applications.

In addition, KCDHH continues to work with the Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to ameliorate the administration of accurate and thorough hearing screenings at the required grade levels to identify students with a hearing loss. Without proper identification at an early age, specialized resources, and accommodations in the school systems, children cannot acquire language in a timely manner and will continue to experience delays as they progress through the school system. Some of these children are already TAP consumers, and our wireless devices are particularly useful in helping them overcome some of those issues, especially as COVID-19 continues to impact the way in which our schools operate.

The Executive Director, Administrative Specialist II, and Document Processing Specialist I planned to attend the TEDPA Conference in September 2020, but it was recently canceled due to COVID-19. If

the conference is rescheduled at a later date, staff members plan to make every effort to attend, assuming there are no significant conflicts.

KCDHH stays abreast of Federal changes in regulations through a web-based members program, which also provides access to information on new technology and equipment used by 38 other equipment distribution programs throughout the nation. Kentucky has traditionally been highlighted as a leader in providing the most advanced telecommunications equipment, and many states have adopted our wireless distribution policy, adding appropriate devices to their programs because of the success of Kentucky's TAP.

### **Legislative Plans for FY 21:**

At this time, there are no plans for this program involving legislation; however, we will continue to support legislation involving text to 911.

### **Outreach Plans for FY20-21 include partnerships with the following entities:**

- Alexander Graham Bell Association
- American Association of Retired Persons
- Area Developmental Districts
- Audiologists, Hearing Instrument Specialists
- Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs
- First Steps
- Hamilton Telecommunications Relay Service
- Hands and Voices
- Hearing Loss Association of America
- Hospitals across the state
- Kentucky Assistive Technology Loan Corporation
- Kentucky Assistive Technology Services Network
- Kentucky Association of the Deaf
- Kentucky Department of Education
- Kentucky Office for the Blind
- Kentucky Office of Aging
- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Kentucky School for the Deaf
- Kentucky Telephone Association
- National Association of the Deaf
- Speech-Language and Hearing Pathologist Association
- Veteran's Affairs

***What TAP accomplishes as a program, providing basic telecommunication services, goes to the core of what our consumers are able to give back to society. We impact the lives of these citizens by providing services that allow them to utilize telecommunications, receive emergency notifications should a state or national emergency occur, and participate equitably in everyday work and life activities.***