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EDUCATION AND LABOR CABINET

Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
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Jamie Link
SECRETARY

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 1, 2025

TO: Jay D. Hartz, Director
Legislative Research Commission

CC: Jamie Link Secretary
Education and Labor Cabinet

Angie Hatton, Chair
Public Service Commission

FROM: Anita Dowd, Executive Director
Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anita Dowd".

RE: Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2025

Per KRS 163.527, the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) Annual Report for the fiscal year 2024 is to be submitted to the Kentucky General Assembly through the Legislative Research Commission on July 1 of each year the program is in operation.

If you have any questions, please contact me at Anita.Dowd@ky.gov or at 502-573-2604.

The Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Since 1995, the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP), administered by the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), has worked to support the more than 700,000 deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-impaired individuals in Kentucky—approximately 17% of the state’s population—by providing specialized telecommunications equipment. We occasionally receive calls, emails, cards, and letters from grateful recipients expressing their appreciation. Below are a few excerpts from FY2025.

“I am grateful for this program and the iPhone sent to me four years ago. The iPhone has helped me tremendously when paired with my hearing aids.”

(Hard of Hearing senior – Berea)

“We are very appreciative of this program for providing the iPhone for my mom. A week before she passed away, she was able to communicate with her grandchildren and great grandchildren using the iPhone she got from KCDHH. Thank you.”

(Daughter of Hard of Hearing senior – Florence)

“Today I received my cell phone from the KCDHH TAP Program. I want to thank those responsible for this program. I appreciate very much receiving this phone and can’t find the words to adequately thank you. It is enough of a problem to lose so much of my hearing, but this will most assuredly make it less of a problem. With all my heart – I thank all of you.”

(Hard of Hearing senior – Bethelridge)

“A few days ago, I received the TAP phone you ordered. What a difference in life, it has made! Thank you soooooo very much. May God bless you.”

(Hard of Hearing woman – Richmond)

“It is a wonderful thing that you all are doing.”

(Hard of Hearing man – Whitesburg)

What TAP accomplishes as a program, providing basic telecommunication services, goes to the core of what our consumers 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.

**Telecommunications Access Program
Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2025**

**Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Anita Dowd, Executive Director**

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

“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 (Telecommunication Devices for the Deaf) 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.”

NOTE: There are currently no major policy or operational issues. The Commission does not intend to make changes in the program and there are currently no proposals for legislative changes in the program.

The number of persons served, and STE distributed:

During FY 2025, the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) directly supported **894** Kentuckians by distributing **1,264** pieces of Specialized Telecommunications Equipment (STE) to eligible individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-impaired. These essential tools help bridge communication gaps, allowing users to access emergency services, connect with loved ones, and maintain independence in daily life.

To expand program reach and streamline access, the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH) provided bulk TAP application packets to service providers across the state. These providers—often audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and case managers—play a critical role in helping applicants navigate the process, ensuring forms are correctly completed and signed by qualified professionals as required by 735 KAR 1:010. Many of these partners have gone beyond basic program knowledge to become strong allies in supporting equitable access for this underserved population.

Funding for TAP and the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) is collected by the Kentucky Public Service Commission (PSC) via a minimal surcharge on telecommunications access lines, as outlined in KRS 278.5499. These funds are distributed to KCDHH for TAP administration and to Hamilton Telecommunications, Inc., the state's contracted TRS provider.

Adapting to Changing Needs

Mobile technology remains the most requested category of equipment, with iPhones and iPads continuing to top the list. These devices, preloaded with specialized telecommunications apps, have become indispensable tools—particularly in emergency situations—offering real-time captioning, access to video relay services, sign language interpreter platforms, and video-based communication options like FaceTime. They are especially vital for consumers who rely on visual communication methods such as sign language or lip-reading.

Meanwhile, captioned and amplified landline phones remain critical for consumers with residual hearing who may not sign or lip-read. To further expand our offerings, KCDHH is currently in the process of reintroducing telephones compatible with electrolarynx devices, supporting the specific needs of speech-impaired users pending procurement finalization.

Program Growth and Emerging Trends

This year, TAP has experienced a noticeable increase in application requests, in part due to the success of outreach initiatives such as *Moore Safe Nights*, which promotes emergency preparedness by distributing weather radios and program information. In response to evolving consumer needs, we are also exploring the addition of the **Jitterbug smartphone** to our equipment list—an accessible

option especially beneficial for seniors due to its simplified design, larger screen, and enhanced audio features.

In addition, TAP's catalog includes signaling devices that alert users to incoming calls and integrate with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, providing critical safety alerts for individuals who may not otherwise hear alarms.

Conclusion

TAP continues to adapt and evolve to meet the diverse communication needs of Kentuckians who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-impaired. Whether it's through mobile technology, amplified phones, or emergency alert systems, our mission remains the same: to reduce communication barriers and improve safety, access, and connection for all.