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May 3, 2024

Mr. Adam Teitzman
Office of Commission Clerk
Florida Public Service Commission
2540 Shumard Oak Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399- 0850

RE: Docket No. 20240043-TP

Request for submission of proposals for relay service, beginning in March 2025, for the deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind, or speech impaired, and other implementation matters in compliance with the Florida Telecommunications Access System Act of 1991.

Dear Mr. Teitzman,

On behalf of Hamilton Relay, Inc., I am submitting the following comments in response to the Workshop Draft, Request for Proposals for Relay Service in Florida, as outlined in Docket No. 20240043-TP and discussed at the April 23, 2024, RFP Bidders Conference. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this critical matter.

Sincerely,
Beth Slough

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beth Slough".

Director of Account Management and Compliance
Hamilton Relay, Inc.

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Hamilton Comments

Over the past few decades, Relay services have continuously evolved to meet the changing needs of users. However, recent years have seen a rapid transformation in State Relay Programs, particularly driven by the Analog to Digital Transition in the telecommunications industry. This transition poses challenges for users reliant on analog forms of Captioned Telephone Service (CTS), particularly those without access to broadband due to financial constraints. There may also be a lack of awareness or education on how to utilize digital technology among certain demographics.

The response to these challenges varies across states, with decisions ranging from multiple contracts to states electing to discontinue their CTS programs to the inclusion of CTS as a mandatory or optional service in Requests for Proposals (RFPs).

Hamilton acknowledges the importance of supporting traditional relay users, including analog-based CapTel users, as evidenced by the significant usage statistics shared in Florida's Draft RFP with over 200,000 CapTel minutes of use in Florida in the last 12 months (intrastate and interstate).

Florida presents a unique landscape for Relay services, with a large population of seniors and veterans. According to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, the state boasts the third-largest military veteran population, with over 1.4 million veterans, 719 thousand of whom are aged 65 and older. Similarly, Florida has a substantial senior population, outnumbering the senior populations of 20 other states combined, as highlighted in the state plan on aging. These demographics underscore the critical need for accessible communication services.

The prevalence of hearing loss in Florida, affecting an estimated 15% of the population, emphasizes the importance of Relay services in facilitating communication for individuals with disabilities. Despite the increasing reliance on digital communication, broadband adoption remains a challenge, particularly among seniors. Data from the American Community Survey indicates that approximately 2 million households in Florida have not adopted broadband wireline services, with seniors being nearly 9% less likely to have broadband access compared to younger populations.

In conclusion, given the demographic diversity and technological challenges present in Florida, it is crucial to continue supporting the analog-based Captioned Telephone program. This program serves as a lifeline for many residents, particularly seniors, veterans, and individuals with hearing loss, who may face barriers to accessing digital communication services. By preserving and enhancing the CapTel program, we can ensure equitable access to communication for all Floridians, regardless of their location, financial status, or technological proficiency.

This commitment to inclusivity and accessibility reflects our dedication to serving the diverse needs of our community and upholding the principles of equal opportunity and communication rights for all.

As we all know, the landscape of relay is changing. Volumes, and revenue continue to decline nationwide, while costs continue to increase. In this changing landscape, we are committed to

continuing to provide all our states with the best possible relay services. This means that, at times, we must balance our resources and, in communication with our states, decide what processes and procedures are most important to provide our states and the end user with a quality relay experience. For these reasons, Hamilton respectfully submits the following sections for the Commission's consideration.

1. Liquidated Damages (RFP page 19, section 34):

Due to shrinking relay usage, the liquidated damages contained in this section are stringent and increase costs. Will the Commission please amend this section by adding the following at the end of Section 34:

Under no circumstances shall the liquidated damages exceed the revenue generated for the respective day.

2. Captioned Telephone Voice Carry Over (RFP page 27, section 20)

During the recent Bidders Conference, the Commission staff asked Providers to indicate the number of points that should be assigned in the Evaluation Process for the inclusion of Captioned Telephone Service (CTS) as an optional service. Hamilton maintains that CTS is highly valuable to Florida's hard of hearing community and proposes that evaluation points should be based on usage.

According to data contained in the draft RFP, CTS intrastate usage equals 22% of the total billed minutes over the last 12 months. Therefore, Hamilton suggests allocating 400 points to the provision of CTS, which is approximately 22% of the eligible TRS points. Below are the specific categories as listed in draft RFP Filing Checklist that we believe are specific to TRS eligible points.

- 100 points - Minimum CA Qualifications/Testing (RFP ref. B-5)
- 100 points - A Training (RFP ref. B-6)
- 100 points - Staff Training (RFP ref. B-7)
- 25 points - Counseling of CAs and Staff (RFP ref. B-8)
- 100 points - Procedures for Relaying Communications (RFP ref. B-9)
- 25 points - Additional Languages Served (RFP ref. B-11)
- 50 points - Release Functionality (RFP ref. B-15)
- 50 points - Speed Dialing (RFP ref. B-16)
- 50 points - Three-Way Calling Functionality (RFP ref. B-17)
- 50 points - Voicemail and Interactive Menus (RFP ref. B-18)
- 100 points - Voice and Hearing Carry-Over (RFP ref. B-19)
- 100 points - Turbocode™ (RFP ref. B-21)
- 100 points - Speech to Speech (RFP ref. B-22)
- 100 points - Access to Pay Per Call Services (RFP ref. B-23)
- 100 points - Caller ID (RFP ref. B-24)
- 25 points - Last Number Redial (RFP ref. B-25)
- 25 points - Obscenity Directed at the Operator (RFP ref. B-26)

- 100 points - Emergency Calls (RFP ref. B-27)
 - 200 points - Blockage (RFP ref. B-28)
 - 200 points - Answer Time (RFP ref. B-29)
 - 100 points - Emergency Operations and Uninterruptible Power (RFP ref. B-33)
 - 50 points - Service Expansion (RFP ref. B-35)
- Total = 1,850 TRS Points**

3. Performance Bond (RFP page 34, section 44):

This section requires the provider to furnish an acceptable performance bond, certified or cashier's check, or bank money order equal to the estimated total first year price of the contract. In light of decreasing relay volumes, we respectfully request the Commission consider modifying this requirement to lower the amount to the estimated total for the first six months' price of the contract.

4. Price Proposal (RFP page 43, section D):

This section requires that bid prices must be on a flat rate basis per billable minute for all billable minutes and not vary depending upon the volume of traffic.

During the recent Bidders Conference, the Commission staff asked Providers to indicate the number of states that have adopted alternate pricing models. Hamilton offers a variety of pricing structures tailored to meet the unique needs and volumes of individual state programs. In order to lower our risks and the state's desire to stabilize pricing and thus reduce costs to our states, 20 Hamilton contracted states have adopted alternate pricing models such as those below.

- Per Minute Rate (preferably a session minute) with a monthly minimum.
 - The monthly minimum ensures that, no matter how much volumes decline, we still have enough to cover those overhead costs we discussed.
- Monthly Recurring Charge (MRC) with overages
 - This pricing structure includes a maximum number of minutes per month, and a price per-minute for any minutes in excess of the maximum monthly allocation.

Therefore, would the Commission consider allowing alternate pricing options?

5. We also offer the below optional services which the State can add to their programs:

- RCC
- VA STS
- STS UTL

Would the Commission consider adding these optional services to its program?

Once again, we thank you for this opportunity to submit written comments.