

TAP/Lifeline Advisory Group Meeting Notes

February 15, 2019

The TAP/Lifeline Advisory Group met on February 15, 2019 from 10am – 12pm.

In person attendees: Anne Thom (PUC), Michelle Rebholz (PUC), Miriam Diaz (PUC), Pa Stelzner (PUC), Erin Petschel (PUC), Sally Anne McShane (PUC), Greg Doyle (DOC), Joy Gullikson (DOC), Joe Dammel (OAG), Jason Topp (CenturyLink), Terry Hildebrandt (Salvation Army), Brent Christensen (MTA)

On phone attendee: Julie Dincau (Education)

After introductions, Commission staff recapped the June 29, 2018 meeting. Consumer Affairs Office (CAO) presented a draft outreach plan. The outreach plan had a two-part focus. First, CAO will train government program providers on the telephone discount programs. Second, telephone providers can better advertise the telephone discounts. The Advisory Group decided to move forward based on CAO's plan. The Advisory Group identified and agreed that the biggest issue is lack of knowledge that the TAP/Lifeline programs exist.

The first and largest hurdle right now is making contacts at the correct government agencies, especially a key Department of Human Services (DHS) representatives representing several programs where the client would qualify automatically for enrollment in TAP/Lifeline. This is needed for training their staff, finding more advisory group members, and as a way of getting to clients of the various DHS programs that we know would qualify for TAP/Lifeline.

CAO will continue working on making those contacts. Advisory Group members will assist by providing his contacts.

Once those contacts are made, CAO will put together a webinar to train government agency employees on what the telephone discounts are and how to sign up their clients. The Department of Commerce Telecom division will assist CAO with proofing the webinar draft. CAO will also reach out to the agencies to ask whether they are interested in onsite training, which CAO will provide. The Office of Attorney General agreed to coordinate with CAO to ensure that Minnesota telephone customers calling the OAG's complaint line are getting information on TAP and Lifeline.

Second, CAO will work with telecom providers on how best to market the telephone discounts more effectively. Advisory Group members will connect CAO with an upcoming Minnesota Telecom Association Customer Service Representative conference. Advisory Group members will work with CAO on possible marketing ideas. Public Utilities Commission staff will put together possible messages for telephone providers to give to customers behind on bills and will circulate them with the group.

Finally, a budget for telephone discount outreach was discussed by the group. There is currently over \$1 million in the TAP fund. \$50,000 was proposed to be used for outreach over the next year. Commission

staff reminded the group that the advisory group must be consulted on the overall amount of TAP funding to be used for outreach and that a recommendation must be formally made back to the Commissioners by approximately July 1, 2019 before the TAP funds can be spent. Advisory group members did not oppose the \$50,000 amount nor the general outreach plan, stating that as long as the funding was used effectively, they were comfortable with the proposal.

The group identified the other organizations that CAO can contact:

- Veteran Affairs contact at the Housing Committee Authority
- HeatShare Advisory Board
- Minnesota Social Service Association conference in downtown Minneapolis
- Minnesota Bar Associations' Telecom group