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June 23, 2015

Mrs. Rosemary Chiavetta
Secretary
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
P.O. box 3265
Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265

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RE: Docket No. P-2015-2484229-Petition of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & industry, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Telecommunications device distribution Program Proposal for Pilot Project—Wireless Expansion Initiative

Secretary Chiavetta:

I write regarding the Department of Labor & Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)'s above referenced petition to implement the Wireless Expansion Initiative pilot project of the existing Telecommunications Device Distribution Program (TDDP).

In many previous meetings with the Advisory Council for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ACDHH), this issue has been greatly vetted among my staff and other designees on this Council. This pilot project, if implemented, will immensely help those eligible Pennsylvanians with disabilities, and will allow the Telecommunications Relay Service Fund (TRS) to remain sustained with adequate funding.

In these technological times we live in, it has become necessary to at least retain the option of offering permanent wireless device options in the TDPP; landline use has declined to the point that funding the TRS adequately without testing the wireless option may threaten solvency.

Additionally, there is a manager already in place of the two-year wireless pilot – Temple University's Institute on Disabilities; and they have a proven decade long successful track record, managing the Commonwealth's TDDP. I am confident that Temple's Institute on Disabilities pilot management will be well run and well-evaluated, achieving the goal of the pilot, which is to determine the feasibility and need of wireless device addition to the TDDP.

Moreover, the pilot does not place a financial burden on the existing TRS fund. Eligible participants would be responsible to provide the internet connection to use the device; the pilot does not budget for these costs nor for travel costs to attend meetings.

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Lastly, the Wireless Initiative pilot is within the parameters of the applicable statutory requirements of Title 35, section 6701.2; this section governs the operations of the TRS and the TDDP.

Specifically, this section defines a “*telecommunications device*” as “*equipment necessary for a person with a disability to engage in communications by wire or radio with another person with a disability or with a hearing individual.*”

This definition clearly covers the distribution of wireless devices to eligible Pennsylvanians with disabilities under the TDDP, and easily falls under the purpose of the Wireless Initiative pilot project.

Any serious consideration for approval of this petition, pilot implementation and release of associated funds available within the TRS fund is greatly appreciated and frankly, desperately needed in order to keep up with emerging technology.

Respectfully,



ED GAINEY

Member, 24th Legislative District

Allegheny County

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives

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