

**Testimony of Terry Morrell**  
**Director for the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened**  
**Maine Department of Labor**

**In Support of LD 1065**  
**An Act to Improve the Telecommunications Relay Services Council by Reducing Its Membership and**  
**Allowing for the Hiring of an Executive Director**  
To the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology

**April 13, 2023**

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Good afternoon, Senator Lawrence, Rep. Zeigler and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology. My name is Terry Morrell, and I am the Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened (DHHLD) within the Maine Department of Labor. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1065, An Act to Improve the Telecommunications Relay Services Council by Reducing Its Membership and Allowing for the Hiring of an Executive Director.

As part of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services at the Maine Department of Labor, our division provides vocational rehabilitation services, as well as information, referrals, and advocacy on behalf of Mainers who are Deaf, hard of hearing and late deafened. Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) and captioned telephone service (CapTel or CTS) allow people who are Deaf, hard of hearing or have speech difficulties to communicate with hearing people. With TRS, an individual can call a single number, 7-1-1, which connects them to the TRS provider for the state who acts as a translator between the hearing and the deaf or hard of hearing individual in the telephonic communication. An important benefit of the system is that it does not require both parties on the call to have assistive devices. This service is vital, not only for health and safety, but the emotional wellbeing of our community members who are able to stay connected with family, friends, and colleagues.

The TRS Council, of which I am a member, is mandated to evaluate and oversee Maine's telecommunication relay services program as certified by the Federal Communications Commission. In recent years, Council operations - including meeting facilitation, budget preparation, contract management, invoice processing and reporting – have been strained because of the limited capacity of the members who are all volunteers. This bill would allow the Council to hire a parttime Executive Director using existing funds to ensure that the Council is able to carry out its duties effectively and in compliance with state and federal regulations. It would also encourage members to be more willing to serve in the officer roles of chair, vice chair and treasurer, knowing that the time-intensive operational functions were

being performed by an executive director. The bill also reduces the number of members by removing the requirement for representatives from a telephone association and a telecommunications relay services company, which have been difficult to fill, but could sit in one of the vacant General Public seats should a representative become available.

Thank you for the consideration of this information. I would be happy to attend the Work Session and answer any questions that you may have.