

# Telecommunications Relay Service Council of Maine

*John Post, Chair*

*Benjamin Frech, Executive Director*



## Testimony regarding

### **LD 210, “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027”**

**February 27, 2025**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Lawrence, Representative Sachs, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Energy, Utilities, and Technology, my name is Ben Frech and I am the Executive Director of the Telecommunications Relay Service Council of Maine. Thank you for having me here today to introduce myself and the Council to the Committee. Maine law specifies that the Council is to prepare and submit to the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) the Council’s annual budget based on the expected projected costs for the coming fiscal year. The law caps the budget of the Council at \$600,000. The Commission is required to transfer funds quarterly to meet the Council’s budgeted costs to the Telecommunications Relay Services Council Fund, which is funded via the Maine Universal Service Fund. The Council submitted its projected budget to the Commission on June 28, 2024.

To provide some context, I would like to tell you a little bit about the Council. Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) allow an individual to 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. 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 for the health, safety, and emotional wellbeing of community members who are able to contact emergency services and stay connected with family, friends, and colleagues.

The Council’s duties are described in statute and in 2018, the legislature enacted LD 1872, “An Act To Enhance the Operations of the Telecommunications Relay Services Advisory Council.” This law removed the Council’s advisory role to the Commission and created a standalone entity.<sup>1</sup>

T-Mobile is the current provider of the other relay services and the contract with T-Mobile was recently extended through March 31, 2025. The Council is currently accepting bids for these services, beginning April 1, 2025.<sup>2</sup> Currently, Hamilton Relay, Inc. is providing Captioned Telephone Services (CTS) through December 31, 2025. CTS is no longer a required service by the FCC.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Council’s full statute can be found [here](#) and the full Council roster is posted on the Council’s website [here](#) and is reflective of the seats required in statute.

<sup>2</sup> Services monitored and administered by the Council are described on its website [here](#)

<sup>3</sup> Captioned Telephone Service (CTS) is outlined on a separate page [here](#).

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In 2023, the Council supported the passage 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.” In June of 2024, I was hired by the Council for the role. The position performs all administrative tasks for the Council, facilitates payments to vendors via the Department of Administrative and Financial Affairs (DAFS), represents the Council with the National Association of State Relay Administrators (NASRA) and the Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA), ensures the Council submits the required state and federal reports, and performs several other duties related to Council business.

The Council is also permitted to contract with a vendor for outreach services. Disability Rights Maine (DRM) is currently providing outreach services. DRM also occupies a seat on the Council, as an appointed seat pursuant to statute.

The contracts for services, the new executive director position, and the outreach contract are the three major encumbrances for the Council. Additionally, the Council is required to meet four times a year and compensates interpreters and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for the quarterly meetings and any additional Council business (subcommittee meetings, presentations, etc.).

Thank you very much for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions and can provide any reports upon request.

Sincerely,

*Benjamin Frech*

Benjamin Frech  
Executive Director