



Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP) [Oregon Lifeline] Advisory Committee

April 29, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Hosted via Zoom

- Attendees:**
- Jon Cray** – Program Manager
 - Kevin Roebke** – Program Outreach Coordinator
 - Chad Ludwig** – Representative of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, or Hard of Hearing
 - Stephen Goins** – Representative of the homeless community
 - Brant Wolf**– Representative of a telecommunications carrier
 - Sam Pastrick** – Representative from the Citizens’ Utility Board (CUB)
 - Nicola Peterson** – PUC Telecommunications Staff Member
 - Jennifer Grentz** – Oregon resident with background in marketing
 - Maria Castro** – Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Representative
 - Nicole Tuite (Observing)** – Applicant to represent CCO
- 1:00 p.m.** **Call to Order:** Kevin called the meeting to order.
- 1:00 p.m.** **Public Comment:** None
- 1:00 p.m.** **Nicola Peterson:** Kevin announced that Nicola was appointed by the Governor as the newest member of the Advisory Committee.
- 1:02 p.m.** **Approval of the 01/28/2021 Meeting Minutes:** Chad Ludwig made a motion to accept the minutes as written; Stephen Goings seconded. The Advisory Committee voted to adopt the motion.
- 1:04 p.m.** **Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Extension of Waivers:** Jon reported that the FCC extended the waiver for involuntary de-enrollments, but decided not to extend the waiver for the regulation governing non-usage regulations. ([DA 21-229](#)). If service is not used within a 45-day period, the FCC requires the company to de-enroll the customer and stop claiming reimbursement.

Beginning May 1, 2021, if a customer has not used service in 30-days, the company must send notice that the customer has 15-days to cure or risk de-

enrollment on May 16, 2021. After de-enrollment, the customer must reapply.

1:07 p.m. **Federal CARES Act & Enhanced OTAP Subsidy:** Jon reported that the federal CARES Act was extended, and as a result, the PUC adopted a temporary rule adjusting the OTAP subsidy from \$7.00 to \$12.00, effective February 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021.

1:09 p.m. **FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program:** Jon informed the Advisory Committee that the FCC recently launched the EBB program in which qualifying low-income customers can receive a discount of up to \$50 or up to \$75 if they reside on Tribal land through providers that elect to participate.

Although similar to Lifeline, the EBB program is distinct; however, an active Lifeline customer automatically qualifies for EBB. The PUC does not administer the EBB program. The FCC requires providers to use the National Lifeline Eligibility Verifier (National Verifier) for EBB eligibility verification and the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) for duplicates checking. Because the PUC opted out of the NLAD and the National Verifier relies on the PUC's Lifeline eligibility determinations, PUC Staff is willing provide the necessary documentation to the FCC.

1:14 p.m. **Tribal Lifeline Outreach:** Kevin discussed outreach efforts with Warm Springs Telecom in which the Company will use Tribal Lifeline-specific bill inserts that the PUC developed for the May billing cycle. Kevin also mailed 500 Tribal Lifeline-specific brochures to the Company.

Kevin also reported that he emailed the other eight (8) federally-recognized Tribes in Oregon about the Tribal Lifeline Program. To date, Kevin has not received a response.

Maria offered to introduce Kevin to the OHA Tribal liaison, Julie Johnson, via email. Jennifer Grentz will introduce Kevin to the Department of Human Services Tribal liaison.

Jon clarified that to be eligible for Tribal Lifeline benefit, the applicant does not need to be a Tribal member, but a resident on the Tribal land.

Jon also informed the Advisory Committee that he had a phone discussion with Coquille Tribe counsel regarding the boundaries of the Tribe. According

to the attorney, Congress enacted into law a bill that recognizes three counties as Tribal lands for the purposes of federal public assistance programs; therefore, Tribal members are entitled to the Tribal Lifeline benefit even if they don't reside on the Tribal land. Jon contacted the Oregon Department of Justice for advice.

1:30 p.m.

Oregon [House Bill 2507](#): Sam informed the Advisory Committee that this bill, currently in the Senate, has two core provisions as follows. (1) "Decouple" the OTAP from the federal Lifeline program. For example, the Federal Communications Commission is eliminating federal Lifeline support for voice service; however, OTAP would not be obligated to do the same. (2) Extend the 2023 sunset date for OTAP to 2030.

Chad asked if the bill gives the PUC authority to determine the future of the Advisory Committee. Sam responded that the bill does not. The statutory provision that created this committee in 2017 would remain intact. Brant stated that the target participation rates are still in the bill; there's no longer the possibility that OTAP would sunset for failure to meet these goals. Jon asked Sam if the bill eliminated the PUC's requirement to submit a report on marketing and outreach efforts. Sam was not aware of any amendments to the reporting requirement.

1:43 p.m.

Oregon Lifeline Outreach: Kevin informed the Advisory Committee that he attended OHA collaborative meetings throughout the state via Zoom. Kevin attended 14 meetings in February and four (4) in March. Each meeting had 15 to 35 attendees with representatives from agencies that support low-income Oregonians. Kevin sent 300 to 400 more OTAP brochures to meeting participants.

Kevin stated CenturyLink used a billing insert to increase awareness about the Oregon Lifeline discount in March. Jon responded that in February, the PUC received 57 applications and in March, the PUC received 699 applications, which represents more than a thousand percent increase. Thus far, in April, the PUC has received 195 applications.

Kevin reported that six other providers will use bill inserts in May.

Brant stated that the numbers demonstrate the need for assistance for low-income individuals. Brant asked how many actually qualified. Jon responded that the figures are not available at this time since CenturyLink has yet to

report any discrepancies that prevent the approved customer from receiving the discount.

Sam requested the percentage of applications for broadband internet access (BIAS) as opposed to voice (phone) service. Jon stated that he will obtain that data.

Brant asked about the applicability of the OTAP and federal Lifeline discount to broadband internet access service (BIAS) if speeds are below the 25 and 3 megabits per second downstream and upstream, respectively. Jon replied that the customer would receive the OTAP discount, but not the federal Lifeline discount since the PUC does not impose minimum service standards for fixed BIAS.

Kevin showed a spreadsheet that illustrated the trend of OTAP participants from July 2020 to March 2021. Jon explained that some companies have slight increases, some are flat, and some have decreases. Jon pointed out that the numbers for Access Wireless dropped significantly in December 2020 because Jon directed the Company to stop requesting OTAP reimbursement for customers in non-usage status. In January 2021, the number of Access Wireless returned to November 2020 levels because the Company is still claiming federal Lifeline for customers in non-usage status. In February 2021, the Company resumed requests for OTAP reimbursement. Jon notified the Advisory Committee that he is investigating the accuracy of Assurance Wireless figures and that enTouch Wireless does not claim OTAP monies.

Kevin stated that he visited each provider's website to confirm whether the provider was promoting Oregon Lifeline and provide feedback, if necessary.

2:12 p.m.

Open seats on the Advisory Committee: The OTAP customer seat is still vacant. Nicole Tuite has applied for the CCO seat and is awaiting confirmation from the Governor.

Kevin asked Brant for an update on the article to be published in certain Oregon Telecommunications Association's members' newsletters about the vacant seat for an OTAP customer. Brant stated that the article is ready for publication.

Chad mentioned that the first term for committee members should be ending soon and asked about next steps. Jon stated that he would review the statute and email the committee.

For recruitment of an OTAP customer, Jon asked Maria what they do to recruit Medicaid customers for OHA committees. Maria was no longer in attendance, but Jennifer Grentz responded by stating that they are typically offered incentives, such as payment, for their participation.

Kevin notified Chad, Sam, Brant, and Steven that their terms end December 2021.

2:29 p.m.

New Business: Jon reported approximately 10 to 12 companies have petitioned the PUC for designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) to receive monies from the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund to build high-speed internet infrastructure in rural areas of the state. To receive ETC designation, the companies must also petition for designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Provider to participate in the OTAP.

Jon reported that in 2016, the FCC Commission ordered the Wireline Competition Bureau to report on the status of the Lifeline Marketplace, which should be forthcoming. Jon stated that he would be evaluating the report for any implications to the OTAP.

2:37 p.m.

Next proposed meeting date: July 29, 2021 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. No one objected to the proposed date.

2:38 p.m.

Meeting adjourned.