

SB 685 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Carrier: Rep. Hartman

House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Action Date: 05/08/23

Action: Do Pass.

Vote: 6-0-4-0

Yeas: 6 - Andersen, Hartman, Nelson, Neron, Nguyen H, Reynolds

Exc: 4 - Cramer, Elmer, Hieb, Scharf

Fiscal: No fiscal impact

Revenue: No revenue impact

Prepared By: Matthew Perreault, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 4/26, 5/8

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Modifies definition of “communication facilitator” to specify that access to assistive services is only to individuals who are deaf-blind, deaf with a physical disability that limits their expressive communication, and hard of hearing with such a physical disability, for purposes of Telecommunications Devices Access Program.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Availability of communication facilitators
- Funding for communication facilitator services
- Effect of proposed amendment
- Services available to deaf persons
- Impact on current contracts with service providers

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

In 1987, the Legislative Assembly established the Telecommunications Devices Access Program through the Public Utility Commission, which provides devices and services to individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech impaired, to enable them to communicate by telephone. The program distributes assistive communication devices that connect to telephones, such as amplified phones, captioned phones, electrolarynxes, speech generating devices, and others. House Bill 3205 (2019) established a “communication facilitator” service through the program, which provides additional personal support services that are necessary for effective communication over a telephone. Communication facilitators are available for persons who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing and have a physical disability that limits their expressive communication.

Senate Bill 685 modifies the definition of "communication facilitator" to specify that access to assistive services are available only to individuals who are deaf-blind, deaf with a physical disability that limits their expressive communication, and hard of hearing with such a physical disability, for purposes of Telecommunications Devices Access Program.