

Method of Funding

In 1991, a law was enacted amending Title 39 of the Rhode Island General Laws that mandated the Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) to establish, administer and promote a Telephone Relay Service (TRS) in the State of Rhode Island through the competitive bidding process.

Pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws, Title 39-1-42, the Commission is statutorily mandated to develop the appropriate rules, regulations and service standards necessary to implement a telecommunication relay service in the State of Rhode Island and to institute an appropriate funding mechanism to recover the costs of providing the service from the general body of telephone ratepayers.

The Commission opened, through the public hearing process, Docket No. 2046 on July 23, 1992 to establish a monthly relay surcharge that would recover the costs of the service. The Commission decided that all local telephone carriers would assess a 10¢ relay surcharge each month to all the intrastate telephone access landlines of both residence and business users. The monthly relay surcharge of 10¢ would be placed on the monthly telephone statements as a distinct line item. The relay assessment money is administered by the Public Utilities Commission and is placed in an interest-bearing, restricted-receipt account. The Commission continuously reviews the balance of the relay account for cash flow purposes. In April of 1998, the Commission decided to reduce the monthly surcharge by 1¢ (from 10¢ to 9¢) in order to prevent further growth in the reserve balance of the account while maintaining a minimum of a two-month balance for positive cash flow.

In 1992 at the inception of Rhode Island’s TRS, information regarding the service and its funding was disseminated to the general public through many forms of advertisement and media. Firstly, promotional flyers and information brochures were distributed to the many hearing and speech-disabled organizations and groups throughout the state. In addition, there was extensive newspaper coverage of the new relay service. The successful bidder, Sprint Relay, also paid for promotional ads in our local newspapers in conjunction with radio advertisements. The Commission also placed information regarding the TRS on its website at ripuc.org.

Within a short period of time after the commencement of the relay service, our agency received feedback from relay users and community groups that businesses were hanging up on relay operators because they assumed it was a crank call. Our agency determined that a special effort must be made to direct the relay promotions towards businesses with a secondary effort towards the general public. Subsequently, the State of Rhode Island inserted language within its periodic RFP requiring the successful relay vendor to place a special emphasis on promotional outreach to educate not only our businesses about the relay service but also to hard-of-hearing senior citizens who are not utilizing the relay service to enhance their communication capability.