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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

**Review of the Telecommunications Relay Services Advisory Council
under the Government Evaluation Act**

The Government Evaluation Act

The Government Evaluation Act ("Act") provides for a system of periodic review of the efficacy and performance of state government agencies. The review of an agency's finances and programs must include a review of agency management and organization, program delivery, goals and objectives, statutory mandates and fiscal accountability (3 MRSA § 951 et seq). The law was enacted in the 117th Legislature to replace the old Government Audit and Program Review Program and substituted a legislative audit of each agency on a rotating basis with an agency self assessment. The first reviews under the Act will be completed at the end of the 118th Legislature.

The keystone to the Act is the agency program evaluation report which consists of a number of components required by the statute. Essentially, the report is an agency self-assessment which the committee of jurisdiction uses as a starting point for its evaluation of the agency's effectiveness, efficiency and performance. The components that must be included in the report are: the agency's enabling state and federal legislation; program descriptions; organizational structure, position count and job classifications; compliance with federal and state health and safety laws; ten-year financial summaries; regulatory agenda; coordinated efforts with other state agencies; constituencies served by the agency; alternative delivery systems; and emerging issues for the agency.

Review Process

Pursuant to the requirements of the Act, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs notified the Telecommunications Relay Services Advisory Council of its intent to review the council shortly after the end of the 118th Legislature's First Regular and First Special Sessions. The Telecommunications Relay Services Advisory Council submitted its Program Evaluation Report on November 1, 1997. The Education and Cultural Affairs Committee held one meeting on January 28, 1998, to conduct the review under the Act.

Findings of Review

The Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs finds that the Telecommunications Relay Services Advisory Council is operating within its statutory authority, has clearly articulated its mission, and continues to focus its resources to provide programs essential to that mission.

The Telecommunications Relay Services Advisory Council's Program Evaluation Report clearly shows that the advisory council has played a significant role in enhancing the outreach and effectiveness of the telecommunications relay service. Between 1991 and 1996, the volume of calls transmitted through the Maine relay service has grown from nearly 39,000 to over 207,000 calls. This growth in relay service call volume represents meaningful access to the telecommunications system for the hearing-impaired and speech-impaired citizens of the State. Further specific information about the advisory council and its organizational structure can be found in the advisory council's Program Evaluation Report.

Recommendations

The Committee commends the Telecommunications Relay Services Advisory Council for submitting a comprehensive Program Evaluation Report. Despite the lack of resources, the Committee acknowledges and applauds the efforts that the advisory council is making. The Committee recognizes the vital need for the advisory council to carry on in its present capacity, particularly since the telecommunications system will continue to undergo tremendous changes with the advance of new technologies and the advent of deregulation. The Committee looks forward to working with the advisory council on an ongoing basis, including any proposed legislation that may be introduced in the 119th Legislature.