

**CHERYL C. KAGAN**  
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*Vice Chair*  
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**THE SENATE OF MARYLAND**  
**ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401**

**SB851: Human Services - Department of Disabilities - Accessibility Programs**  
**Finance Committee**  
**Hearing: Tuesday, March 10, 2020, at 1:00pm**

SB851 transfers the Telecommunications Access Maryland (TAM) program from the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to the Department of Disabilities (MDOD). TAM would also make some program changes based on the recommendations of the deaf, deafblind, and broader disabilities community. The TAM program administers the Maryland Relay Service, a free public service that allows people, unable to use a standard telephone, to both make and receive calls. The Relay is vital to the deaf and hearing-impaired citizens of our State.

The TAM program has been housed in multiple agencies over the years, including Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHS), Maryland Department of General Services (DGS), and Maryland Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and currently DoIT. Its mission is to provide services internally, rather than to the public.

Last August, the Administration hired a new director for TAM, David Bahar, who had been serving as Relay Manager for the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. He has had a distinguished 15-year career in deaf policy. After his arrival, it became apparent that it made sense to move TAM to MDOD, the only such cabinet-level State agency in the nation.

In developing this legislation, MDOD consulted with the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR), which includes broad representation from the deaf and disabled community. The recommendations from GABTR are incorporated into the bill, including improving and expanding services for Marylanders who are deafblind (with little or no useful hearing and little or no useful sight); strengthening lines of communication with stakeholder organizations; and changing the qualifications of the TAM director.

TAM makes an enormous contribution to the lives of thousands of Marylanders. It's time to find a permanent home for this important program.

I urge a favorable report on SB851.

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**SB851: Telecommunications Access Maryland - Glossary**

**DBM:** Maryland Department of Budget and Management -- one of numerous former homes of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland program.

**Deafblind:** The condition of little or no useful hearing and little or no useful sight.

**DGS:** Maryland Department of General Services -- one of the numerous former homes of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland program.

**DHS:** Maryland Department of Human Resources -- one of the numerous former homes of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland program.

**DoIT:** Maryland Department of Information Technology -- the current home of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland program.

**GABTR:** The Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay provides Maryland Relay with vital feedback and insight on the issues that affect its users.

**MAT:** Maryland Accessible Telecommunications -- allows the Maryland Relay program to provide accessing equipment to qualified individuals who have difficulty using a standard telephone, including people who have limited mobility or cognitive abilities.

**MDOD:** The Maryland Department of Disabilities -- charged with coordinating and improving the delivery of services to individuals with disabilities in Maryland.

**Relay:** Maryland Relay -- a free public service that allows people, unable to use a standard telephone, to both make and receive calls. People who are Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, DeafBlind or have difficulty speaking can make or receive calls to and from anyone with Maryland Relay's calling options.

**TAM:** Telecommunications Access of Maryland -- administers the Maryland Relay Service. There are an estimated 1.2 million legally deaf persons above the age of 12, according to the Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing.

**TTY:** Teletypewriter.

**USTF:** Universal Service Trust Fund -- pays for the services provided by Maryland Relay, including Relay calling options and assistive equipment distribution. USTF is funded by a telecommunications subscriber surcharge, which is collected by communications companies.