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Senate Finance Committee
Senate Bill 851: Human Services - Department of Disabilities - Accessibility Programs
Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is the largest statewide advocacy organization dedicated to the rights and quality of life of children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. We are working to create a world where children and adults with I/DD have and enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

The Arc Maryland is pleased to support Senate Bill 851: Human Services - Department of Disabilities - Accessibility Programs which transfers the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM program) from the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD).

The TAM program makes it possible for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have the equal right and opportunity to communicate independently. The TAM program serves people with developmental and intellectual disabilities by providing the technology to use augmentative and alternative communication devices like picture phones, mobility aids, and voice aids through customized evaluations (free of charge to find out what works best for each individual.)

We support the transfer of the TAM program from DoIT to MDOD. The Arc Maryland has a long and positive history of collaborative partnership with MDOD. Some of the ways in which we have collaborated include the regular sharing of information related to the needs of Marylanders with I/DD, the administration of community programs overseen by the MDOD, and partnerships to improve equity and access for people with I/DD. Some specific examples of projects shared between The Arc Maryland and MDOD include work in the formation and operation of The Ethan Saylor Alliance, the development and the implementation of the Equal Employment Act to phase out the use of subminimum wage, the "Together We Are Better" statewide inclusive schools initiative, and the Developmental Disabilities Administration Transformation efforts. The MDOD has an experienced leader, with a team that is knowledgeable, inquisitive, and dedicated to removing barriers for people and enhancing access for all.

In each experience we have had working with the Maryland Department of Disabilities, the Department has been an excellent partner; modeling the balance of leading as well as teamwork. It is from our many positive experiences that The Arc Maryland is confident in our assessment that moving the TAM program to MDOD will be beneficial to the people of the state of Maryland.

The Arc Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 851.

Sincerely,
Ande Kolp
Executive Director