

March 10, 2020

Randy Murbach
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Subject: Senate Bill SB0851

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

I am sending this letter in opposition to the Senate Bill - SB0851 that is proposing the **Telecommunication Access of Maryland (TAM)** program to be transferred from the Maryland Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to the MD Department of Disabilities (MDoD).

I've been a resident of Maryland since 1997 and have been deaf since birth. I'm unable to hear on the phone and I have relied on some form of telecommunications relay service (TRS) since 1986. I have worked with TAM on a professional and personal level since 1997 and Maryland is a role model to many other states in managing a highly successful Maryland Relay (TAM) program which serves deaf and hard-of-hearing constituents throughout the state.

I recommend having the TAM program transferred to the **MD Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH)** for the following reasons:

- ODHH is the sole state office that provides expertise related to deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Maryland.
- ODHH was established in October 2001 through legislation (Chapter 537 of the Acts of 2001 General Assembly).
- According to MD State Govt Code 9-2403, the responsibilities of the Office shall include:
 - (1) providing, advocating, and coordinating the adoption of public policies, regulations, and programs that will benefit deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
 - (2) improving access to communication and to existing services and programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
 - (3) providing direct services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals as appropriate;

TAM program would fit perfectly under "direct services" and this is our opportunity now to move all D/HH related services/programs under the purview of ODHH and consolidate all the resources in one place.

I'm opposed to MDOD handling TAM due to their lack of knowledge, understanding and empathy of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) community in Maryland. In addition, MDOD has no clear history or track record of advocating on behalf of D/HH Marylanders.

Please **amend** this SB0851 bill to replace MDOD with **GODHH** or conduct a **summer study** with the understanding that ODHH lead this study and that the committee consist of at least 51% D/HH members.

Thank you for listening to my concerns.

Sincerely,

Randy Murbach
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