



State of Maryland
Telecommunications Access of Maryland
MD Relay

Department of Information Technology

LARRY HOGAN
Governor
BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
Lieutenant Governor

MICHAEL G. LEAHY
Secretary
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Deputy Secretary
DAVID J. BAHAR
Director

DATE: March 4, 2020

BILL: House Bill 1003: Human Services - Department of Disabilities - Accessibility Programs

COMMITTEE: House Health and Government Operations Committee

POSITION: Letter of Support

RE: *Written Testimony for House Bill 1003*

Good afternoon, Chairman Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and Committee members.

Telecommunications relay services provides Deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled and DeafBlind people with the ability to use the telephone through relay operators.

For many, the ability to make telephone calls independently, at any time of day, has been life-changing. When the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, 114 years had passed since the telephone was patented, and generation after generation of Americans with hearing loss or speech disabilities were isolated from telecommunications, unable to make or receive calls without the assistance of their family, friends or neighbors. The availability of relay services was life-changing. It opened doors to social interaction, employment opportunities, autonomy, and more.

The first call that was made using Maryland Relay Services on December 1st, 1991 used TTY technology. Today, TAM continues to provide TTY relay services, and has added new types of relay services to meet the needs of a wider range of people with hearing loss: captioned telephone relay services, Relay Conference Captioning, and Real-time Text relay services. Captioned telephone relay services is our second most popular relay service by volume of calls, and is used primarily by individuals with hearing loss, but who can speak on the phone.

The Telecommunications Access of Maryland division also houses the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications program, which provides qualified Marylanders who experience difficulties using a standard telephone with assistive telecommunications equipment, including amplified telephones, ring signalers, Braille TTYs, tablets and other tools to support day-to-day communications.

We are grateful for the support that the Department of Information Technology has provided to the TAM division over the years. Fundamentally, DoIT and TAM's missions are very different: DoIT is internal-facing, supporting state agencies, while TAM is external-facing and interacts with thousands of Marylanders every year.

The Maryland Department on Disabilities is, like TAM, a public-facing entity and provides services directly to Marylanders. TAM and MDOD also have a history of collaboration: the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program, a program administered by TAM, was established in consultation with the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay and MDOD. TAM also entered into a memorandum of understanding with the MDOD's Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MDTAP) to provide assistive telecommunications evaluations services in seven Maryland counties as well as



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Baltimore City.

The legislation before you reflects not just a rehomeing from TAM from one agency to another; it also contains important provisions to improve TAM's ability to serve Marylanders. MDOD could have accomplished the transfer through a departmental bill without improving the TAM program for future generations. We at TAM are grateful to MDOD for collecting feedback from GABTR and the community and moving forward with a private bill containing a number of important enhancements. For instance, MDOD has ensured the addition of language in this bill to support the DeafBlind community, today one of our most underserved constituencies, with the statutory authority to establish a DeafBlind communication facilitator program. MDOD has also ensured the addition of language requiring the Director of TAM to be Deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled or DeafBlind, and to be a user of relay services. These and other progressive provisions in this bill are necessary to ensure that TAM continues to meet the needs of Deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled and DeafBlind Marylanders today and well into the future.

I urge a favorable report for this legislation. Thank you very much.

Very Truly Yours,

David J. Bahar
Director, Telecommunications Relay of Maryland