

**DATE:** March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 and March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020

**BILL:** House Bill 1003 – Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs and Senate Bill 851 – Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs

**COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations Committee and Senate Finance Committee

**POSITION:** Support

Dear Chairs Pendergrass and Kelley,

**The Governor’s Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR)** is pleased to submit this letter of support for Senate Bill 851 and House Bill 1003, which transfers the operations and oversight of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) program from the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD).

**GABTR** provides Maryland Relay and the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications program with consultation on the administration of cost-efficient, 24-hour, dual party telecommunications relay services. SB851/HB1003 is important to **GABTR** because:

- The TAM program serves users with a wide range of accessibility needs, including Marylanders with hearing disabilities who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, Blind/low vision, as well as Marylanders with physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities. The range of constituents receiving TAM services is similar to that which is being served and supported by MDOD. MDOD has a strong constituent services for hearing people with disabilities and outreach team and can help expand TAM’s reach to people with speech and other disabilities.
- MDOD has expertise in program development and management, and is adept in developing partnerships with state and local policymakers, county and municipal leaders, and members of the advocacy community.
- The bill requires that the TAM Executive Director is an actual user of TAM services stating “the TAM Director ... shall be an individual who is Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, or speech disabled,” ... and is a full-time user of telecommunications relay services.”
- The bill gives the TAM Director direct access to the Secretary of Disabilities and charges the Director with advising the Department. The TAM Director will serve as a

member of the MDOD Executive Leadership Team. Other members include the Deputy Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretary, and Director of Communications and Outreach.

- The proposed legislation will cross-pollinate existing stakeholder groups to open channels of communication by: adding a representative from the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay as a standing member of the Maryland Commission on Disabilities (MDOD's advisory board); adding a representative from the Maryland Commission on Disabilities as a standing member of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay; and adding a representative from the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as a standing member of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay.
- One of MDOD's priorities is emergency preparedness policy development and training. MDOD's Director of Emergency Preparedness currently serves as the Secretary's designee on the Next Generation 911 Commission and is an advocate for accessible technology integration. The transfer of TAM to MDOD will amplify the integration of such technologies with Next Generation 911 to ensure services are equally accessible to Marylanders who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or who have speech or communication disabilities.

For these reasons, we urge your committee to give this legislation a favorable report. If you have any questions, please contact **Alfred Sonnenstrahl** at 240-292-6786.

Sincerely,

Alfred Sonnenstrahl

Acting Chair

Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay