



DATE: March 10, 2020 **COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance
BILL NO: Senate Bill 851
BILL TITLE: Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 851 - Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs.

Bill Summary:

This legislation transfers the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) program from the Department of Information Technology to the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD).

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is an internationally recognized institution dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with pediatric developmental disabilities and disorders of the brain, spinal cord and musculoskeletal system, through patient care, special education, research, and professional training.

Within Kennedy Krieger’s diversity of programs and services is our Assistive Technology Clinic. Professionals from the disciplines of speech language pathology and occupational therapy collaborate to help patients with a variety of communication, learning and mobility needs communicate and build independence.

- **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)** strategies may assist with improving communication. AAC strategies range from low-tech solutions like picture communication boards to high-tech communication systems with speech output and a variety of access methods. Access methods may include use of switch scanning, a head mouse, or eye gaze.
- **Mobility Options:** occupational therapists with expertise in mobility solutions will complete a seating and power mobility evaluation, make recommendations and work with wheelchair vendors to ensure customized devices to meet patient’s needs.
- **Computer and Phone Access:** adaptive keyboards and mice; voice commands; text to speech; touch screens; switch scanning; apps for memory and organization.
- **Environmental Controls:** Examples include controls for lights, televisions and phones.

Kennedy Krieger partners with MDOD in a number of external communities-based programs such as the Project Search program, our employment program, our Leadership Education in Neurodevelopment Disabilities (LEND) program, our graduate training program, and our community-based Maryland Center for Development Disabilities.

Rationale:

The TAM program and Kennedy Krieger’s populations intersect, as the TAM program is available to any Maryland resident age three years and older for whom a standard telephone is inaccessible. Within the TAM program, the Maryland Assistive Technology program evaluates program participants’ needs and find the right technology solution for them to use technology and communicate independently. Similarly, Kennedy Krieger's Assistive Technology Clinic is dedicated to the principle that through the use of technology, individuals with disabilities can greatly improve their independence and ability to communicate.

Kennedy Krieger supports the community focused TAM program move from the Department of Information Technology to the MDOD, as the latter is better equipped to engage the community and users of the service. The legislation codifies TAM’s existing practices, making it a more effective, targeted service.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 851.