



GOVERNOR'S COORDINATING OFFICES

Community Initiatives · Service & Volunteerism · Performance Improvement
Crime Prevention, Youth, & Victim Services · Small, Minority, & Women Business Affairs
Banneker-Douglass Museum · Volunteer Maryland · Deaf & Hard of Hearing

TO: SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE

DATE: March 10, 2020

RE: SB 851 – HUMAN SERVICES – DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES – ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAMS

POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The Governor's Coordinating Offices, which includes the Office of Community Initiatives, Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services, Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Office of Performance Improvement, and Office of Small, Minority, & Women Business Affairs, are in support of Senate Bill 851 – Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs, which would transfer the administration and management of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) program from the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to the Department of Disabilities (MDoD).

TAM oversees all Maryland Relay services and programs, including Captioned Telephone service and the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications program. While many users of TAM are members of the Deaf and hard of hearing community, the program also provides access to telecommunications services to a broader user group and is not exclusive to the Deaf and hard of hearing community. It is also responsible for the administration of NFB-Newsline, which provides round-the-clock access to more than 300 publications for the blind and those who cannot read conventional print. Relay services allow people who are unable to use a standard telephone to make and receive calls. TAM is also actively engaged in constituent-based programs, and educating the community about services and equipment through activities such as presentations, school programs, community events, and business partnerships.

While TAM's administrative placement in DoIT has been sufficient over the years, a move to the Department of Disabilities would allow the programs under TAM to be integrated within a larger constituent-based infrastructure and network that MDoD has to offer. The Maryland Department

of Disabilities, by its very nature, is strongly constituent-focused, and is charged with coordinating and improving accessibility for individuals in the State of Maryland. TAM's move to MDoD would enable it to more efficiently deliver services within the agency's collaborative culture that works across all state government agencies and offices. Accessible telecommunications services would become part of a mission-driven organization providing the level of advocacy and guidance to ensure that state agencies deliver services – including TAM services – in the most integrated way possible, developing the most consistent policies affecting TAM users, and considering their diverse needs when making decisions that affect those in need of telecommunications access. Moreover, this access would become part of the Department's goals and objectives in its array of MDoD programs, including housing, employment, youth services, barrier-free living, transportation, and community life.

TAM's substantial mission to the Deaf and hard of hearing community would be further strengthened as well through a number of forward-thinking provisions in this legislation. Through valuable collaboration with the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Department of Disabilities recognizes the enormous value of placing Maryland Relay's executive leadership in the hands of a Deaf director and plans to continue that arrangement after the program would be transferred from DoIT.

Some in the Deaf community have expressed a desire to transfer TAM to the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing rather than the Department of Disabilities, and I would like to address that issue. While we acknowledge the vital role ODHH has in serving the Deaf and hard of hearing community, the depth and breadth of MDoD's programs, outreach, and constituent services make MDoD the best home for the program, enabling the program to prosper and be most effective in providing services to the full spectrum of constituencies served by TAM. The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing supports the Governor's goal to provide full access to all Marylanders by providing expertise, primarily in an advisory and policy role, that enhances the general welfare of the state's Deaf and hard of hearing residents. Providing constituent services and managing statewide programs is not part of ODHH's core mission, and that is why we support Senate Bill 851 as written. As such, ODHH will continue to focus on its mission of providing valuable advisory and policy expertise, and vest TAM in the more fulsome and external-facing Department of Disabilities. This will take TAM to a whole new level of application and relevance to the people it serves. The Hogan Administration is committed to excellence and innovation in providing Deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders and all of the state's residents with disabilities the best programs and services possible.

For these reasons, the Governor's Coordinating Offices respectfully request a favorable report for Senate Bill 851.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. J. Lally". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrick J. Lally, Senior Executive Director