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MAYOR

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SB 851

March 10, 2020

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director of Government Relations

RE: **Senate Bill 851 – Human Services - Department of Disabilities - Accessibility Programs**

POSITION: **SUPPORT.**

Chair Kelley, Vice-Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 851.

This bill would transfer the administration and management of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland and Telecommunications Devices and Distribution of Accessible Information for Disabled Individuals programs from the Department of Information Technology to the Department of Disabilities. It would also require the Department of Disabilities to provide staff, including a director, to the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay. The purpose will be to make conforming changes to the telecommunications relay services for those individuals who cannot access it in a traditional manner.

SB 851 will have the effect of creating additional representation for individuals with disabilities in the state of Maryland. If enacted it would provide agency representation from the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Department of Disabilities to the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay.

It is vital that program participants who cannot otherwise access the telecommunications relay services be given an alternative. Access to telecommunication and distribution of accessible services furthers the health, safety, and well-being of disabled individuals. The bill would establish and administer cost-efficient dual-party relay systems as well as provide communication facilitators or related support services to provide greater access.

For the above reasons, we respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 851.

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