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March 4, 2020

Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair
Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair
House of Delegates
Health & Government Operations Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen St.,
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 1003: Human Services - Department of Disabilities - Accessibility Programs

Dear Honorable Chair Pendergrass and Vice-Chair Pena-Melnyk;

Following the recent Town Hall Meeting at the Savage Library sponsored by Howard County Association of the Deaf last Saturday, February 29, 2020, I am writing this letter to **OPPOSE** the HB 1003: transfer of the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) and Telecommunications Devices and Distribution of Accessible Information for Disabled Individuals program administration and management from the Department of Information Technology (DOIT) to the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD).

The reason for this opposition of the HB 1003 is twofold by the following:

- 1) to maintain the TAM and Telecommunications Devices and Distribution of Accessible Information for Disabled Individuals program primarily and largely for persons who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-disabled;
- 2) to minimize the confusion and the misuse of the Special Funds with other disability groups.

Telecommunication access is completely different than physical access because the needs of telecommunication access are primarily for persons who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-disabled. Over 90% of the telecommunication equipment distributed and consumers served by the Telecommunication Devices and Distributions program are deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing. Almost all users of Maryland Relay are deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing.

The transfer of TAM and Telecommunications Devices and Distribution of Accessible Information for Disabled Individuals program from the DOIT to MDOD would be inappropriate and disregard the original intention of the TAM and accessible telecommunication distribution for persons who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-disabled.

More appropriate and necessary for the transfer of TAM and the accessible telecommunication distribution program is to the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) under the auspice of Maryland Governor's Office. The ODHH already has resources including highly qualified staff and program as well as the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay Services (GABTR). The budget will not be impacted as it is a "stand alone" budget from the Special Funds. It is not allowed to be mixed with general fund budgets. The ODHH would be best to oversee the TAM and the accessible telecommunication distribution programs for persons who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and speech-disabled.

Your understanding and favorable response to this opposition of the HB 1003 would be greatly appreciated. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask us. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

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

Mark J. Myers, PhD

Cc: Health and Government Operations Committee

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Harry (H. B.) Bhandari

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