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Health and Government
Operations Committee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Fair Practices
and State Personnel Oversight

House Chair

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The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2020

Maryland House of Delegates
Health & Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: House Bill 1003 (Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs)

Dear Chair Shane E. Pendergrass, Vice-Chair Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, and Committee Members:

Good afternoon, Chairman Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and fellow Committee Members. I am pleased to introduce House Bill 1003, which transfers the Telecommunications Access Maryland, or TAM program, from the Department of Information Technology to the Department of Disabilities

The TAM program has been housed in multiple agencies over the years, including DHS, DGS, and DBM, and is currently housed at DoIT. However, with recent changes in the program's leadership, the Administration took an opportunity to evaluate whether the program would be better positioned under the purview of the Maryland Department of Disabilities, the only such cabinet-level state agency in the nation. To explore this further, DoIT and MDOD entered into an MOU in October 2019 to begin this conversation and evaluate whether MDOD would be a more advantageous home for this vital program.

It was determined that MDOD has both the infrastructure to absorb and support the program and its goals, as well as help it grow and flourish. MDOD is, in fact, an external-facing organization and TAM is very much an external program that serves thousands of Marylanders every year; as compared to DoIT, which is an internal-facing agency whose core mission is to provide technical support and solutions to state governmental agencies.

In developing this legislation, MDOD consulted with the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunication Relay (or "GAB-TAR"), which includes representatives from a wide variety of TAM/Maryland Relay services. These conversations produced many positive developments, and these recommendations from GABTAR are incorporated into the bill which you have before you.

The most important takeaway is that this bill does not merely transfer the TAM program from one department to another; it contains a number of other progressive provisions, including provisions that improve and expand services for Marylanders who are DeafBlind, provisions that open lines of communication between stakeholder organizations, provisions that change the qualifications of the TAM director, and a provision that strengthens the voice of the program director, all of which my sponsor panel will discuss in their testimony.

With that, I am pleased to introduce my panel: David Bahar is the new director of the TAM program, Christian Miele is Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of Disabilities, and John Brennan is the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department.

And so I'll hand it over to them, and urge a favorable report for this piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Erek L. Barron