

## **Darrin R. Smith**

**DATE:** March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**BILL:** House Bill 1003 – Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs

**COMMITTEE:** House Health and Government Operations Committee

**POSITION:** Support

Good Afternoon Chair Pendergrass,

My name is Darrin R. Smith and I'm a member of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunication Relay – called GABTR. I'm here in front of you as an individual to express my affirmation in support of this legislative bill House Bill 1003 – Human Services – Department of Disabilities – Accessibility Programs.

There are several reasons why I support this bill – however before I state my reasons – I understand that some individuals are here in opposition to the bill; I appreciate the opportunity to lay out the facts – when bills are drafted they are not drafted in a committee of the whole State; they are drafted with a representative group of stakeholders. In the case of this bill, GABTR, which under Maryland law, advises TAM on the implementation and operation of its programs and services, met twice to discuss the transfer of TAM from DoIT to MDOD. Both of these meetings were held in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and all members of the community were welcome to attend. Notice of the meetings were also posted on social media and on TAM's website.

In these meetings, GABTR asked MDOD for a number of changes to strengthen the TAM program and better position it to more fully serve the needs of Marylanders who rely on TAM services. GABTR also asked for and received advice from Director Brick on how to position this bill to best support Marylanders who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and he provided advice to GABTR, per his role as Director of ODHH. These recommendations are included in the bill before you.

The President of the Maryland Association of the Deaf (called MDAD) also attended these meetings, and voiced his support for the bill after receiving reassurances from the Secretary of MDOD that the integrity and independence of TAM would be preserved.

I understand that a common theme of opposition is that TAM should be placed under the Deaf or hard of hearing. I oppose that for the simple reason that TAM serves more than just the Deaf and hard of hearing. Those who oppose this bill have not given an idea or plan of action that could be best looked at that will preserve these items, that GABTR and ODHH asked to be included in the bill, that I strongly believe will benefit the TAM program and give the proper support the community it serves.

The Governor has made it his mission for all of the state agencies to provide the Gold Standard for their consumers and I believe that by moving TAM to MDOD, we would be seeing TAM under an agency that would successfully execute the Gold standard – and would be able to provide more services to *all* of the constituencies that TAM serves.

The conditions that were established by GABTR and which are reflected in the bill today really allows TAM to be able to look at various opportunities for expanding their services; and this bill, by providing members of GABTR serving on various other commissions, the Maryland Commission on

Disabilities and the Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, would facilitate full access to transparency, understanding and cross-collaboration opportunities.

In conclusion – passage of this bill is crucial to positioning TAM to best serve Marylanders, and will give TAM crucial statutory tools to do so. I stand strong in affirmation of the bill itself.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report for HB1003.

Sincerely,

Darrin R. Smith