



GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY BOARD FOR  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY

Larry Hogan  
Governor

Betty Jean Dodds  
Chair

Boyd K. Rutherford  
Lieutenant Governor

January 1, 2017

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr.  
President  
Senate of Maryland  
H-107, State House  
State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

The Honorable Michael E. Busch  
Speaker  
House of Delegates  
H-101, State House  
State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

Dear President Miller and Speaker Busch:

I am pleased to submit the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) annual report for calendar year 2016, in accordance with § 3A-503(d) of the State Finance and Procurement Article.

In 2016, the members of GABTR, Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) staff, and representatives from the current Maryland Relay provider, Hamilton, met four times in various Maryland counties.

During these public GABTR meetings, quality and trends in current relay services, current and future telecommunications technology, current TAM outreach efforts and future outreach needs to ensure that Maryland citizens are aware of the services provided by the State of Maryland were addressed. The interactive structure of the GABTR meetings allows for maximum feedback from consumers as well as the dissemination of vital information to citizens who are now, or could be, users of Maryland Relay. This venue further allows GABTR and TAM to solicit feedback on the quality of service and the communications needs of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, speech disabled, Blind, low vision, cognitively disabled, Deaf-Blind, and mobility limited communities. These communities are served through our TAM managed programs – consisting of Maryland Relay, the Maryland Captioned Telephone Relay Service, the Newline Reading Service for the Blind and the Maryland Accessible Telecommunication (MAT) equipment distribution programs. Additionally, TAM staff provides information related to regulatory updates from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that may impact TAM's future fiscal and/or operational obligations for current and newer modes of relay and equipment.

In 2015 GABTR was pleased to work with TAM on an initiative to add tablets to the MAT program. That initiative came to life in 2016 with the addition of tablets to the MAT program. These tablets, intended for people who are Deaf, Deaf Blind, Hard of Hearing, or are living with limited speech, mobility, or cognitive abilities provide access to Video Relay, IP Relay, Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP-CTS), Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) Apps, and other telecommunication methods through preloaded software applications (Apps). Since the addition of the tablets in September 2016, TAM has already reported to GABTR a 300% increase in applications. The largest increases have been among Deaf, speech disabled individuals, and those with limited mobility. GABTR looks forward to seeing the continued positive impact they will have in keeping the MAT program at the forefront of technology, ensuring no population is underserved.

We reported last year that in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2015 the Secretary of DoIT was able to recommend that the USTF surcharge be cut in half and lowered to \$.05. Due to other fiscal change announcements as well as pending legislation, the action of changing the surcharge to \$.05 was delayed until April 2016. Collection at the new rate began June 2016. The new rate still covers the cost of the programs currently being provided by DoIT/TAM; however, TAM continues to be aware that the FCC may transition the payment of IP services to states, which will change program costs at that time.

Keeping these issues in the forefront, GABTR looks forward to working with the TAM office to continue providing exemplary services to the citizens of Maryland.

Sincerely,

*Betty Jean Dodds*

Betty Jean Dodds  
Chair

cc: The Honorable David Garcia, Secretary, DoIT  
Brenda Kelly-Frey, Director, TAM