

CONNECTION

WINTER 2024



Telecommunications
Access of Maryland

PROGRAMS:



Maryland Relay

Dial 7-1-1

A service for Marylanders who have difficulty using a standard telephone.



Maryland Accessible Telecommunications

Equipment Distribution Program

This program provides accessible telecommunications equipment for Maryland residents ages three and older who are Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or are living with limited speech, mobility, or cognitive abilities.

MDRelay.org
MDMAT.org

**Interested in becoming
a Communication
Facilitator?**

Visit page 6 to learn more!

**Get the latest updates
from GABTR.**

*Check out page 8 for a recap
of the October meeting.*



Left to right: Maryland Relay Outreach Coordinators Connor Fitzsimmons, Marcus J. Smith, and JC Smith on Nymeo Field at Harry Grove Stadium, home of the Frederick Keys baseball team.

Get to Know Our New Maryland Relay Outreach Coordinators

We're thrilled to announce that we have several new faces on the Maryland Relay outreach team. Get to know Connor Fitzsimmons, JC Smith, and Marcus J. Smith, our newest outreach coordinators.

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Get to Know Our New Maryland Relay Outreach Coordinators, continued



Connor Fitzsimmons is a recent graduate of James Madison University's Class of '21, where he received a Bachelor of Science in communications. The New Jersey native previously worked at a rock radio station before moving to Towson and joining the Maryland Relay team. "I am looking forward to serving the community and helping make people's lives better through this position," shares Connor. "This is an opportunity to make Maryland a more connected state with Relay services and to improve my presentation and exhibitor skills." Connor looks forward to making Maryland Relay outreach fresh, fun, and exciting.

Fun Facts About Connor:

- He took an ASL class during his last semester of college and it inspired him to learn more about Deaf culture.
- He loves sports—especially basketball, football, soccer, and hockey—and video games.
- His current favorite guilty pleasure TV show is *Vanderpump Rules*.



JC Smith is a native of Mississippi but now lives in Maryland. Before becoming a Maryland Relay outreach coordinator, JC was an assistant football coach at Model Secondary School for the Deaf and a student development assistant at the Center for Black Deaf Studies. Currently, JC is working towards graduating from Gallaudet University in May 2024. "I am looking forward to getting the word out about Maryland Relay's services and reaching more people in our state," he shares. "My grandmother inspired me to work with Maryland Relay because she uses a Captioned Telephone to communicate, and I want to help more people find these services and resources."

Fun Facts About JC:

- He enjoys listening to music, playing video games, and reading books.
- He is a member of Gallaudet University's Class of '24.
- His current favorite guilty pleasure TV show is *Green Arrow*.



Marcus J. Smith is a resident of Baltimore with a background in special education and technology sales. Marcus holds a degree from Gallaudet University and has a passion for building connections with people and supporting them in any way that he can. As someone who is hard of hearing, Marcus understands firsthand how important it is to have accessible communication. "I am very committed to advocating for services, tools, and resources that empower people," he shares.

Fun Facts About Marcus:

- During his free time, he loves watching video podcast channels on YouTube, going to Orioles baseball games, spending time with his friends, and rating restaurants in the DMV.
- His current favorite guilty pleasure TV show is *Empire*.



Want to schedule an event with our outreach team? Call 800-552-7724 or 410-767-6960 (Voice/TTY) or 443-453-5970 (Video Phone) and ask to speak to one of our outreach coordinators, or email TAM.Outreach@Maryland.gov and one of our team members will get back to you.



The TAM Team Attends the Maryland Association of Counties Conference

The TAM team always looks forward to the opportunity to visit Ocean City for the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) Conference, and this year certainly did not disappoint. TAM Director David Bahar, Outreach Manager Donna Broadway-Callaman, and MAT Manager Kevin Steffy made the trip to the Roland E. Powell Convention Center from August 16 – 19 for a fun-filled experience that included a Taste of Maryland reception, crab feast, technology expo, and a closing address from Governor Wes Moore.

Invite the TAM team to speak or exhibit at your next event!
Contact our outreach team today at 800-552-7724 or 410-767-6960 (Voice/TTY) or 443-453-5970 (Video Phone) to learn more.

Pictured above: TAM Director David Bahar, Outreach Manager Donna Broadway-Callaman, and MAT Manager Kevin Steffy pose with friends at MACo.

A highlight from the conference was showcasing the custom-made state pride shirts that the TAM team members sported throughout the week. It was such a pleasure to be able to reunite with old colleagues and friends while making new connections at MACo, all while spreading Maryland Relay and MAT's mission to make telephone communication accessible for everyone.



TAM Recognizes Upcoming Holidays and Important Awareness Days and Months

This winter, the TAM team plans to join our friends in Maryland and on social media as we celebrate upcoming holidays and acknowledge several significant awareness days and months.



JANUARY

National Eye Care Month – Your vision and eye health are both very important—that’s why each new year begins with National Eye Care Month. Even though some eye conditions are unavoidable or require more intensive care, there are many simple actions and habits that can help you maintain good eye health. This month, try to schedule a comprehensive eye exam if it’s been a while since your last visit, and remember that good lighting, protective eyewear, sunglasses, and frequent breaks from device screens can help you protect your eyes. **Make sure to follow us on social media and let us know how you’re acknowledging National Eye Care Month this year.**

World Braille Day | January 4 – Did you know World Braille Day is celebrated around the globe on the inventor of Braille’s birthday? It’s true! Louis Braille was born on January 4, which is why on this day we recognize and raise awareness for the millions of people who are blind or visually impaired. Even though many of these individuals have found innovative ways to use Braille to read and communicate, as well as navigate their everyday lives, there are still opportunities to improve our world to make it more accessible. This month, do your part to learn more about Braille, see beyond vision loss, and make our workplaces, schools, stores, restaurants, and communities as a whole more inclusive. **Looking for accessible services that support vision loss? Visit MDRelay.org today.**

Martin Luther King Jr. Day | January 15 – Each year, we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Day on the third Monday of January as a way to honor the civil rights leader’s life and incredible legacy during his birth month. Even though the TAM office is closed on this federal holiday, we encourage our team and community members to participate in the National Day of Service for MLK Day. Interested in volunteering? The Governor’s Office on Service and Volunteerism has great resources for finding volunteer opportunities in your community. **Visit GOSV.Maryland.gov/Volunteering-In-Maryland/ to learn more.**

Better Business Communication Day | January 22 – Good communication is key when you own or manage a business. Better Business Communication Day promotes valuable ways to ensure your employees and customers feel connected and acknowledged. Maryland Relay Partner is a free program designed to create stronger connections between businesses and Relay users by educating businesses of all sizes on how to identify, receive, and place Relay calls. You can celebrate Better Business Communication Day by learning more about Relay Partner and its benefits. **Visit DoIT.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/Relay-Partner.aspx to get started.**

FEBRUARY

Black History Month | Low Vision Awareness Month | National Senior Independence Month

February is a very busy time of year that includes several important month-long observances, including Black History Month, Low Vision Awareness Month, and National Senior Independence Month.

Each year during **Black History Month**, we celebrate the historical impact of Black individuals and communities and how their achievements and contributions have shaped our nation. This year's theme is "African Americans and the Arts" and focuses on the many ways Black Americans have influenced music, dance, the visual arts, cultural movements, and more.

Make sure you're following our social media to learn more about influential Black leaders and organizations that advocate for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities, as well as those living with limited mobility, speaking difficulty, or cognitive difficulty.

Low Vision Awareness Month raises awareness for those who have visual impairments and informs the community on what it's like to live with vision loss. Even though vision loss does not define someone, there are things people with low vision have to do differently—which is why it's so important to advocate for accessibility-friendly tools and resources. The MAT program provides eligible Maryland residents—including those with low vision—with the opportunity to apply for free telecommunications equipment to independently make or receive calls. **Could you or a loved one qualify? Visit [MDMAT.org](https://mdmat.org) to find out.**

National Senior Independence Month

focuses on the ways the community can support older adults as they discover new ways to lead thriving lifestyles as they age. Many seniors experience age-related hearing and vision loss, but with the help of Maryland Relay and MAT, they can still stay connected over the phone. **Visit [MDRelay.org](https://mdrelay.org) and [MDMAT.org](https://mdmat.org) to learn more about the communication solutions and assistive equipment that's available for eligible older adults.**

National Caregivers Day | February 16 –

National Caregivers Day shows appreciation for all of the family members, friends, and professionals who are caregivers and dedicate their time to ensuring the well-being of others. The observance day raises awareness about the responsibilities and challenges of being a caregiver, but it also honors caregivers and connects them to one another. This day helps caregivers from across the U.S. form a close-knit community of people who understand the role and can offer advice, tips, and guidance along the way. Are you a family caregiver? **Visit [CareGiverAction.org](https://caregiveraction.org) to learn more about the Caregiver Action Network and how you can get involved.**





Be Part of the Communication Facilitator Service

MAT's Communication Facilitator (CF) service helps individuals who are DeafBlind (DB) stay connected via a video communication platform and assistance from a Communication Facilitator. Calls are supported through any kind of video communication platform, including Videophone (VP), Video Relay Service (VRS), FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, Google Hangout, Google Meet, and more.

To ensure the very best services for our users who are DB, MAT is searching for committed individuals who are interested in becoming a Communication Facilitator or CF service scheduler.

Communication Facilitators are responsible for:

- Facilitating conversations between a caller shown on a videophone screen and the individual who is DB
- Providing visual information to a person who is DB, usually through close vision or tactile sign language, during calls
- Assisting users who are DB so they may freely express themselves during calls in their own language and communicate directly with others

CF service schedulers are responsible for:

- Reviewing CF service scheduling requests
- Setting up CF service times for users
- Ensuring there are Communication Facilitators available for calls
- Directing all questions and concerns regarding the CF service to the MAT team



Mark your calendars! There will be a Protactile Communication Facilitator training in the spring of 2024. We will be sharing more information soon on social media and in our upcoming newsletter.

Interested in becoming a Communication Facilitator? Contact Kevin Steffy, MAT program manager, to learn more and apply: 410-246-4418 (office), 443-852-6717 (text only), or email Kevin.Steffy@Maryland.gov.

Visit DoIT.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/CommunicationFacilitatorService.aspx for additional information.

Apply Directly Online for Equipment from MAT

Spread the word—the MAT program equipment application can be accessed, completed, and submitted directly online on your computer, smartphone, or tablet! Visit **MAT-Apply.org** to get started. For those who do not wish to complete their equipment application online, MAT still accepts applications that are:

- Downloaded, printed out, and submitted by mail
- Requested by mail and submitted by mail
- Downloaded and submitted by email to MAT.Program1@Maryland.gov

If you apply and do not qualify, you may purchase equipment directly from a third-party provider. Individuals who purchase equipment may still receive a free evaluation.

Scan the QR code to review the list of qualifications and apply today!



For further questions about the MAT equipment application process, please call 800-552-7724 or 410-767-7253 (Voice/TTY) or 410-801-9618 (Video Phone). All completed applications and copies of required eligibility forms that are submitted by mail must be sent to:

Telecommunications Access of Maryland
Maryland Accessible Telecommunications
301 West Preston Street, Suite 1008A
Baltimore, Maryland 21201



Travis Dougherty and Kevin Steffy Accept Esteemed 2024–2025 Chair Positions



Travis Dougherty



Kevin Steffy

Two of our TAM team members, Travis Dougherty and Kevin Steffy, are set to start two exciting journeys in 2024, one with the National Association for State Relay (NASRA) and the other with the Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA).

Recently, Travis accepted NASRA's offer to serve as 2024 – 2025 board chair. Having previously served as vice chair of NASRA's board, Travis has helped the organization successfully guide and pave the way for other State Relay Administrators who offer Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) to their citizens.

Kevin will serve as TEDPA's 2024 – 2025 chair and help the association further its mission to successfully administer specialized telecommunications equipment to those who need it. As chair, Kevin will also work collaboratively with the equipment distribution programs across the country that supply and set up these devices.

The entire TAM team is so proud of Travis' and Kevin's achievements! We know they will do wonderful work in collaboration with NASRA and TEDPA.

Make sure you're following us on social media to be the first to know about the latest NASRA and TEDPA news and events.


Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711 | Instagram.com/MDRelay711 | Twitter.com/MDRelay711

Get the Latest Updates from the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay

The Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) met on October 26 at the TAM office for a hybrid meeting that was also streamed on the Maryland Relay Facebook page. During the meeting, TAM Outreach Manager Donna Broadway-Callaman introduced the board to the new outreach coordinators and informed of their most recent and future community events. TAM Director David Bahar touched on important updates, such as TAM's upcoming meeting with Maryland's Secretary of Aging, Carmel Roques, while Maryland Relay Manager

Travis Dougherty shared the latest on Real-Time Text (RTT) and the Universal Telecommunications Access Platform (UTAP).

MAT Manager Kevin Steffy informed attendees about the "Talk, Text, and Train for the Blind/Low Vision Community" event that was held on September 27 at the National Federation of the Blind. Kevin noted that the event was extremely successful with 45 participants, five device trainers, and five guest speakers. Participants were trained on how to set up and use seven wireless devices, including the Hable One, Blindshell, Google Pixel, Mini Vision 2, Smart Vision 3, Memory Cell Phone, and the RealSam Pocket.



Save the Date for These Upcoming GABTR Gatherings

January 25, 2024 – Virtual Meeting,
Livestreamed on Facebook

April 25, 2024 – In-Person Meeting,
Location TBD

July 25, 2024 – In-Person Meeting,
Location TBD



Visit MDRelay.org to learn more about GABTR.
Questions about upcoming GABTR meetings? Email Maryland Relay Manager Travis Dougherty at Travis.Dougherty@Maryland.gov.

General Updates

- Finance Manager
- TRACE Ctr. Opportunities
- Early Dec. – SCC Meeting with Sec. Roques
- State Ctr. Move Updates

October 26, 2023 Director's Report



If you missed the October meeting, don't stress! You can watch the full livestream on the Maryland Relay Facebook page at Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711.

What's New with Maryland Relay?

Our new outreach team is doing great. They have hit the ground running with relay partner trainings, community events, presentations, and field visits.



JC Smith



Connor Fitzsimmons

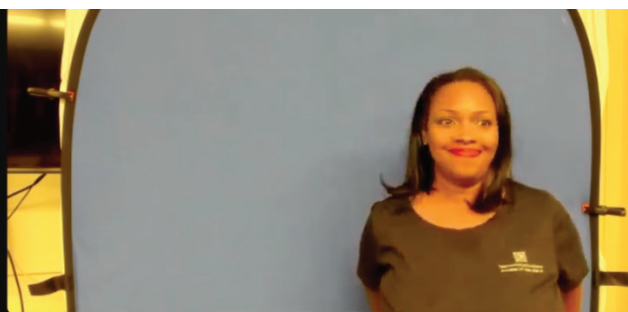


Marcus Smith

Our upcoming outreach events:

- NARFE board meeting
- Winter MACO
- NFB-MD
- A presentation with Suburban Hospital
- Maryland Rural Health Conference
- Several relay partner and RCC trainings
- Veteran's Day events
- Holiday networking events

October 26, 2023 Public Relations & Outreach Report



General Updates

- RTT
- UTAP

October 26, 2023 Maryland Relay Manager Report



Congratulations to the New Maryland Association of the Deaf Board

The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD)—an organization dedicated to preserving, protecting, and promoting the rights of Marylanders who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and DeafBlind—recently announced its new board. The TAM team looks forward to working with all of the MDAD board members on future initiatives to better our great state!



President - Tina Joyner



Vice President -
Jacob Leffler



Secretary - Tiasha Bera



Treasurer - Allysa Dittmar



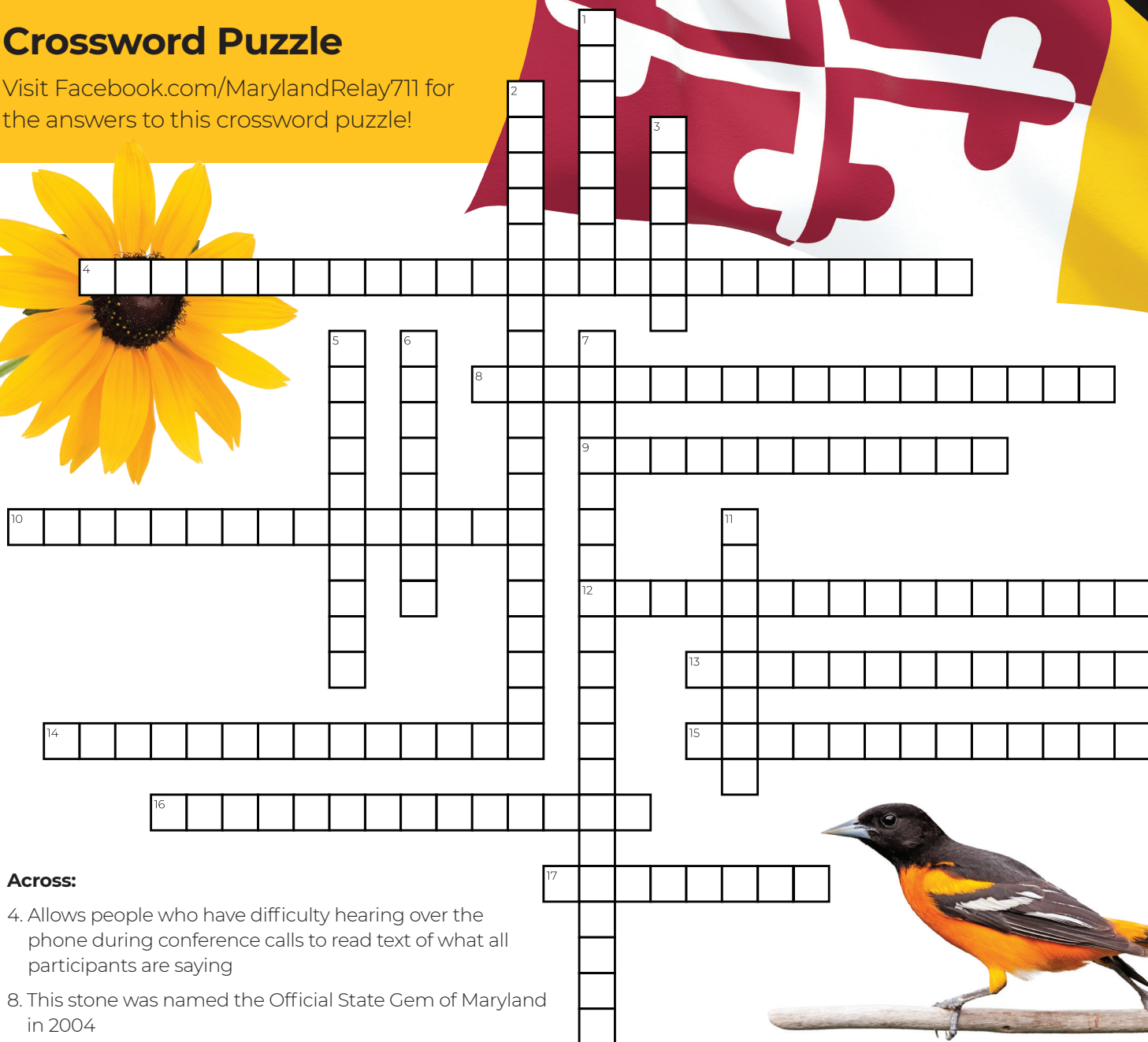
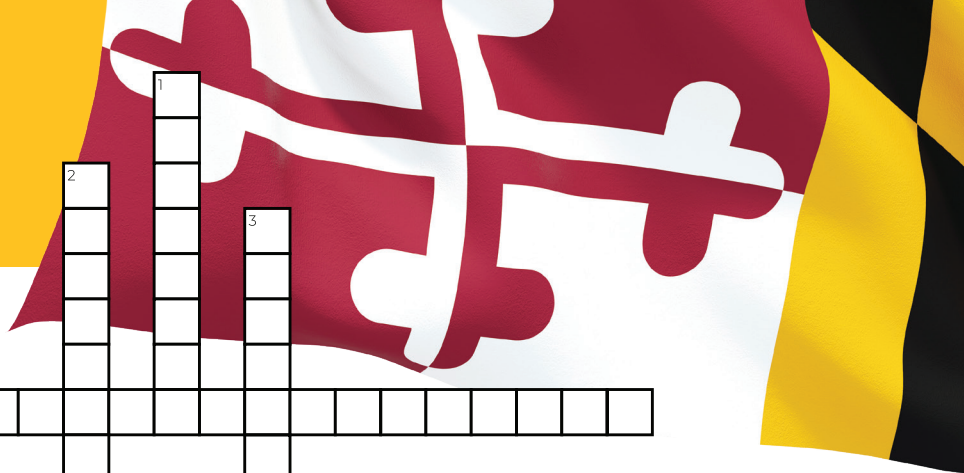
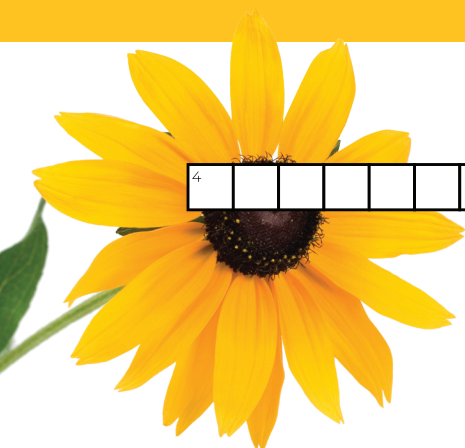
Member at Large -
Toyin Fasakin



Member at Large -
Vikki Porter

Crossword Puzzle

Visit [Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711) for the answers to this crossword puzzle!



Across:

4. Allows people who have difficulty hearing over the phone during conference calls to read text of what all participants are saying
8. This stone was named the Official State Gem of Maryland in 2004
9. Transmitted instantly as it is typed—eliminating the need to hit “send” and allowing for faster, more accessible communication
10. Official State Bird of Maryland
12. A service for individuals who can hear clearly, but have difficulty speaking or being understood over the phone
13. Accessible device that has a keyboard that allows users to type their side of the conversation and a text screen to read the other person’s responses
14. This has been the Official State Flower of Maryland since 1918
15. A free public service that enables Marylanders who are unable to use a standard telephone to make and receive calls
16. Maryland was named after this queen
17. Popular nickname for American lager from Baltimore, MD



Down:

1. Official Team Sport of Maryland
2. Official State Reptile of Maryland
3. Popular seafood seasoning originally made in Baltimore, MD
5. Provides Maryland residents with an opportunity to apply for free telecommunications equipment needed to independently make or receive phone calls
6. First Official Sport of Maryland (not to be confused with the Official Team Sport of Maryland)
7. Maryland Relay team members who go out into the community and share valuable communication resources
11. Official State Tree of Maryland



Telecommunications Access of Maryland

301 West Preston Street, Suite 1008A
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

 Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711

 Twitter.com/MDRelay711

 Instagram.com/MDRelay711

Apply Today for the 2024 Hamilton Relay Scholarship



Students—it's that time of year again! Submissions are open for the 2024 Hamilton Relay Scholarship and are due by January 31, 2024. The Hamilton Relay Scholarship supports students in their post-secondary education who are Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking.

Maryland high school students who meet Hamilton Relay's qualifications and are pursuing higher education are encouraged to apply for the \$500 scholarship. One scholarship winner will be selected in each of the states where Hamilton Relay is the contracted Telecommunications Relay and/or Captioned Telephone Service provider.



Looking for scholarship support? Please visit HamiltonRelay.com/Scholarship to download the Hamilton Relay Scholarship guidelines and application.