

CONNECTION

SUMMER 2024



Telecommunications
Access of Maryland

PROGRAMS:



Maryland Relay

Dial 7-1-1

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

MDRelay.org



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. MAT also oversees the Communication Facilitator (CF) service for individuals who are DeafBlind.

MDMAT.org



Maryland Accessible Telecommunications Evaluators Are Here for You

Marylanders who find it difficult to use a standard telephone to independently make or receive calls have the opportunity to apply for specialized, state-provided telecommunications equipment through the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program. The MAT program offers a wide variety of solutions and tools—from amplified phones to hands-free phones to tablets—to support your day-to-day communications, plus there are dedicated evaluators to help you find the solution that's right for you.

MAT evaluators are available to assist you virtually or at one of our statewide MAT evaluation centers. During your evaluation, you will work one-on-one with your evaluator to try out different equipment options and identify the one that best meets your needs. MAT evaluators are also available to help you if your communication preferences change or if you need assistance with your current equipment.

Thinking about applying for telecommunications equipment through MAT or scheduling an evaluation? Visit MDMAT.org to learn more.

**Interested in becoming
a Communication
Facilitator?**

Visit page 7 to learn more!

**Test your Maryland
Relay knowledge!**

*Check out page 11 for
Maryland Relay trivia.*



Out and About in the Community with the Maryland Relay Outreach Team

The year has been off to a busy start for our Maryland Relay outreach team—consisting of JC Smith, Marcus Smith, and Connor Fitzsimmons. As outreach coordinators, they have had the opportunity to travel across the state educating people about the benefits of Maryland Relay and the MAT program and how both offer essential communication solutions with accessible services and equipment.

JC and Connor (*picture A*) kicked off 2024 by joining Alex Simmons of the Governor’s Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) at the Clerc Classic—a competition for basketball

and cheerleading teams made up of athletes who are Deaf from different parts of the country—hosted at the Maryland School for the Deaf and sponsored by Maryland Relay. Not only were both outreach coordinators able to host a table at the event, but they also enjoyed watching the competition and cheering on the talented teams.

JC also had the pleasure of visiting several libraries to conduct outreach presentations—including locations in Crofton, Chestertown, and Calvert County—while Connor attended events such as the B’more Healthy Expo and Bowl for





**Meet the Maryland Relay Outreach Team
at Upcoming 2024 Events**
Visit [Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711)
for more details.

Your Heart at the ZETA Senior Center. Connor also worked directly with the Memory Loss Forum at Morgan State University to educate more people about how Maryland Relay can help those who experience memory loss.

Marcus (*picture B and C*) also had an awesome experience attending the National Federation of the Blind Conference (*pictured bottom left*), where he learned more about how the Equipment Distribution Program could support the blind community. He also had the opportunity to advocate for open captions at movie theaters during the Annapolis Committee Session.

In March, Marcus paid a visit to the Indian Head Senior Center in Southern Maryland for a presentation focused on the role of TAM and how the state agency oversees and manages Maryland Relay and MAT to help keep Marylanders connected. Lauren Gifford from Hamilton Relay was there to witness Marcus' engaging presentation firsthand. She had this to say: "I was fortunate enough to observe



Frederick County Veterans Appreciation Day
July 20 | 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
583 Himes Avenue, Frederick, MD

Marcus' presentation today. He did a fantastic job engaging the crowd." Marcus took his presentation at Indian Head Senior Center one step further by teaching the individuals in attendance how to sign "amazing day" and "good morning." Everyone had nothing but great things to say about the presentation, and they walked away with a lot of useful information to help them feel empowered and independent when it comes to using the phone.

We're so proud of all of our outreach coordinators and the incredible work they're doing in our state!



Show Your Support for the Visionaries of the Creative Arts

At TAM, we believe the creative arts are for everyone—whether you're the appreciator of the arts or the artist! From theater to film, dance to music, visual art to spoken art, there are so many different ways to captivate an audience, but to do so, you must be inclusive and willing to explore and showcase diverse points of view.

The Visionaries of the Creative Arts (VOCA) is a nonprofit based in Washington, DC, that does just that. The organization strives to amplify the creative works of Black, Indigenous, People of

Color (BIPOC) artists who are Deaf or hard of hearing both locally and nationwide. Since July 2019, VOCA has provided a much-deserved platform for artists from the Deaf/Hard of Hearing BIPOC Community so they can share their incredible talents with the public.

VOCA offers workshops, programs, events, and productions that are centered around the creative arts and how these forms of expression can be used to address social justice and racial equity to make a meaningful difference in our world.

Visit VOCArts.org today to learn more about the nonprofit organization and to explore upcoming workshops, programs, events, and productions.



Photos courtesy of VOCA website



Seeing Beyond Vision Loss at The Maryland School for the Blind's Annual Festival

Maryland Relay had the pleasure of sponsoring and attending The Maryland School for the Blind's (MSB) 2024 See Beyond Festival. MSB welcomed everyone of all ages to attend the annual event at their campus on Saturday, April 27, for a day of exploration and fun, which included immersive activities where guests could wear light-blocking eyeshades to experience life without sight.

From sports like blind soccer and lacrosse to beep baseball and sprint track, and activities such as braille and tactile arts and crafts, the event allowed attendees to experience what day-to-day life is like for many of MSB's students.

Outreach Coordinator Connor Fitzsimmons attended the event and hosted a booth where he was able to meet so many current and future Maryland Relay users. "It was a privilege for the TAM team to be part of the 2024 See Beyond Festival, and our outreach coordinator had a wonderful time," shares Donna Broadway-Callaman, TAM outreach manager. "We look forward to this event each year as it allows us to connect with so many community members who could benefit from Maryland Relay and the MAT program. On behalf of everyone at TAM, we'd like to extend our thanks to MSB for allowing us to play a part in such a hugely successful event for the Blind and Low Vision Communities in Maryland."

Make sure you're following us on social media, at Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711 and Instagram.com/MDRelay711, to see more photos from MSB's See Beyond Festival! Visit MarylandSchoolfortheBlind.org/See-Beyond-Festival to learn more about the annual event.



The Latest from the Communication Facilitator Service

The MAT program's Communication Facilitator (CF) service is growing thanks to regular trainings to onboard new Communication Facilitators to help Marylanders with combined vision and hearing loss stay connected. Calls occur via a preferred video communication platform, and Communication Facilitators use Protactile, close-vision sign language, or tactile sign language to relay the conversation and visual information on screen to the CF service user.

On March 23, 2024, MAT held a successful Communication Facilitator training at the Student Academic Center (SAC) on Gallaudet University's campus. "The MAT team was thrilled to have a total of fifteen participants, four trainers,

four attendees who are DeafBlind, and four Teaching American Sign Language (TASL) interpreters at the March training," shares Kevin Steffy, MAT program manager. "During our time together, we covered very essential information for Communication Facilitators, such as the Code of Professional Conduct (CPC), and we discussed important topics that included background and lighting checks, boundaries, ethics, trauma-informed services, and more to help all of our Communication Facilitators feel confident in their skills." These trainings ensure all of MAT's Communication Facilitators can provide an effective service with understanding and compassion for those they're assisting.



"The MAT team was thrilled to have a total of fifteen participants, four trainers, four attendees who are DeafBlind, and four Teaching American Sign Language (TASL) interpreters at the March training."

Kevin Steffy, MAT program manager



Pictured on spread: Participants and trainers at the March 23, 2024 training session



Interested in becoming a Communication Facilitator?

For more information, please contact:
Kevin Steffy, MAT manager at
Kevin.Steffy@Maryland.gov



Attend the Next GABTR Meeting

The next GABTR meeting will be held on July 25, 2024. Make sure you're following Maryland Relay on social media for more information about the upcoming gathering.

Facebook: [Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711)

X: [@MDRelay711](https://twitter.com/MDRelay711)

Interested in joining GABTR? The Board is currently accepting applications for several open positions. To learn more, please email Travis Dougherty, Maryland Relay manager, at Travis.Dougherty@Maryland.gov.

Maryland Relay Service Spotlights

Shining the Spotlight on Speech-to-Speech (STS)

Do you have mild to moderate speaking difficulties, but you can hear clearly over the phone, and want to create stronger connections? STS can help you feel confident while talking to family, friends, coworkers, doctors, and more. STS is ideal for, but not limited to, anyone living with, or who has experienced a:

- Stroke
- Stuttering
- Laryngectomy
- Cerebral palsy
- Multiple sclerosis
- Muscular dystrophy
- Parkinson's disease
- Traumatic brain injury

With STS, you will be able to either speak with your own voice or with an assistive device. A Maryland Relay Operator listens and re-voices what you say during the call, as needed, to the other person while you listen. In addition to STS, Maryland Relay offers Visually Assisted STS if you'd like to connect using a video-calling platform.

For this service, a Maryland Relay Operator uses speech and visual cues to facilitate your conversations. The Operator observes your mouth movements, facial expressions, and gestures, and then re-voices your words, as needed, to the other person on the video call. You can then listen directly to the other person's response.

To make an STS call...

1. To begin a call, dial 800-785-5630 for STS (or 855-828-6465 for Visually Assisted STS).
2. A Maryland Relay Operator will greet you and provide their Operator identification number.
3. Tell the Operator that you'd like to make a "Speech-to-Speech" or "STS" call.
4. Tell the Operator the number you wish to call.
5. Inform the Operator if you wish for them to re-voice everything you say, or just when speech is difficult to understand. You can instruct them to intervene upon request from you or the other person.
6. Enjoy your conversation!





Shining the Spotlight on Spanish Relay

Did you know Maryland Relay offers convenient and accessible Spanish Relay services to help bridge any communication gaps between Spanish-speaking Relay users and standard telephone users? It's true! If Spanish is your native language, and you would benefit from Relay services, our Spanish-speaking Maryland Relay Operators are here to help!

With Spanish Relay, you can enjoy seamless conversations whether they are relayed in Spanish-to-Spanish or Spanish-to-English formats.

To make a Spanish Relay call...

1. Dial 7-1-1 or the Spanish Relay direct access number, which is 800-877-1264.
2. A Spanish-speaking Maryland Relay Operator will greet you and provide their Operator identification number.
3. Tell the Operator the type of Relay call you wish to make and whether this will be a Spanish-to-Spanish or Spanish-to-English call*.
4. Tell the Operator the number you wish to call.
5. Inform the Operator if there are any additional communication preferences you'd like them to keep in mind during the call.
6. Enjoy your conversation!

*Whether you're in the mainland U.S., Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands, you can place calls effortlessly. (Please note that long-distance charges may apply. Check the list of current long-distance carriers on DoIT.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/Spanish-Relay.aspx for more details.)

Celebrating 20 Years of the Maryland Department of Disabilities

Mark your calendars—the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDoD) will be celebrating its 20-year anniversary on October 1, 2024. With a mission that ensures no Marylander is left behind, MDoD promotes “equality of opportunity, access, and choice for Marylanders with disabilities,” and it has made a tremendous difference in so many people’s lives over the past two decades. The TAM team looks forward to celebrating the department’s incredible accomplishments this fall at its anniversary celebration (more details to come).

Make sure you’re following MDoD on social media for the latest details on its anniversary events.

Facebook: [Facebook.com/MDDDisabilities](https://www.facebook.com/MDDDisabilities)

X: @MDDDisabilities



NATIONAL
DEAF
HISTORY MONTH

Celebrating Deaf History Month

Each year from April 1 to 30, we celebrate and honor the incredible achievements and contributions of individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing and have paved the way through their resilience, talents, or advocacy efforts to create a better future for other members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community.

At TAM, we are so fortunate to have leaders such as David Bahar, TAM director; Travis Dougherty, Maryland Relay manager; and Kevin Steffy, MAT manager, who work tirelessly to ensure every

Maryland Relay user and MAT recipient has the services, equipment, and resources needed to feel supported by and connected to their fellow Marylanders. David, Travis, and Kevin have shown great dedication to not only serve the citizens of our state and ensure we have accessible communication, but nationwide as well. On behalf of the entire TAM team, we’d like to acknowledge and thank all of the individuals from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community who are constantly breaking down barriers and advocating for a world where anyone and everyone can truly thrive.

Test Your Knowledge with Maryland Relay Trivia

Let's see how well you know Maryland Relay's history and services! Circle your answers to the questions below and then check them against the answer key on the back cover of the page.

1. What does TRS stand for?

- A) Telephone Relay Service
- B) Telecommunications Relay Service
- C) Telephonic Response System
- D) Transmitted Radio Signal

2. Which technology does TRS often utilize to assist those who are Deaf or hard of hearing in making phone calls?

- A) Text-to-Speech
- B) TTY (Text Telephone)
- C) Voice Recognition
- D) Morse Code

3. Which of the following is NOT a type of TRS?

- A) CapTel (Captioned Telephone)
- B) IP Relay (Internet Protocol Relay)
- C) VHS Relay (Video Home System Relay)
- D) Speech-to-Speech Relay

4. How does the Speech-to-Speech Relay Service (STS) help users?

- A) It translates speech from one language to another.
- B) It provides a text transcript of a voice conversation.
- C) It assists people with speech disabilities in being understood over the phone by a specially trained operator.
- D) It converts spoken words into sign language videos.

5. In what year did Maryland Relay begin providing TRS to its residents?

- A) 1981
- B) 1990
- C) 1995
- D) 2000

6. Maryland provides a specific program to help eligible residents obtain specialized telecommunications equipment. What is this program called?

- A) Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT)
- B) Maryland Communication Assistance Program (MCAP)
- C) Maryland Telehealth Support Scheme (MTSS)
- D) Maryland Internet for All (MIFA)

7. Which landmark law, significant to both Maryland Relay services and the rest of the country, mandates the availability of TRS for individuals with hearing and speech disabilities?

- A) The Civil Rights Act of 1964
- B) The Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- C) The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990
- D) The Communication and Video Accessibility Act of 2010





Telecommunications Access of Maryland

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

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 [Instagram.com/MDRelay711](https://www.instagram.com/MDRelay711)

Nominations are Open for Hamilton Relay's Community Leader Award

It's that time of year again—nominations are now open for Hamilton Relay's Community Leader Award. This honor was established by combining two of Hamilton Relay's prestigious honors—the Deaf Community Leader Award and the Better Hearing and Speech Month Recognition Award.

Individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind, late-deafened, hard of hearing, or have difficulty speaking can be nominated for this recognition, as well as any Maryland organizations that serve these specific communities. If you know a Marylander or Maryland-based organization that's committed to volunteerism, leadership, advocacy, and bettering the community around them, please consider nominating the individual or group for the 2024 Hamilton Relay Community Leader Award.



Don't forget to submit your nomination before August 2, 2024!
Visit [HamiltonRelay.com/CommunityLeader](https://www.HamiltonRelay.com/CommunityLeader) to complete your submission today to recognize an inspirational individual or organization in Maryland.