

# CONNECTION

SPRING 2022



Telecommunications  
Access of Maryland



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](http://MDRelay.org)

**MAT program completes first call with CF service.**

*Check out page 3 to learn more!*

**What happened "On This Day in History" more than 20 years ago?**

*Turn to page 6 to find out!*



*Willis Mann, first row and second from the left, along with Gil Becker, Curtis Humphries, Brenda Kelly-Frey, and more at the original Sprint Relay Call Center.*

## The Faces of TAM: Meet Willis Mann, the First TAM Director

In the late 1980s, Willis Mann traveled from California to Baltimore to interview for the director role with the brand-new Maryland Relay Service (MRS). He was one of 28 applicants who applied for the position, and he brought experience from Northern California's Sacramento Relay program, where he served as the first director.

After accepting the role with MRS, Willis began working under the Department of Human Services to develop a reliable funding system to support the new Maryland Relay Service. "We tried several approaches, but it wasn't until a bill was passed in the Maryland General Assembly, establishing a \$0.10 per month surcharge on all Maryland telephone bills, that we were able to set up a funding base," explains Willis.

Once the funding was secured and the surcharge was applied, MRS moved under the Department of General Services, which handled all the phone services in Maryland at that time, and Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) was created. "After TAM was established and Maryland Relay was ready to run, we had to develop an exhibit that

*Read more about Willis Mann on page 2* ▶



## Meet Willis Mann, the First TAM Director, continued

*Willis Mann, top row and far left, with Brenda Kelly-Frey, Gil Becker, Senator Thomas Mike Miller, Jr., Governor Parris Glendening, and more.*

could travel around Maryland to show what Relay services offered,” shares Willis. “We showed people how Relay worked so they would understand—which was a fun part of the job!”

Following the necessary steps to get TAM and Maryland Relay up and running, Willis and his team had to develop a Request for Proposal for a service provider—which generated responses from MCI, Sprint, and Hamilton Relay. Shortly after Sprint was selected as the official service provider, the first Maryland Relay call was made in 1991. “We had support from Governor

Schaefer and the secretary of the Department of General Services,” states Willis. “It was amazing to see how the number of people using the service increased and increased—one time it was 100,000 Maryland Relay calls in one month and we realized how great the demand was for our service.”

With a significant rise in Relay use, TAM was able to establish an equipment distribution program, known to many Marylanders today as the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program. During this time, the TAM team really grew. “Anne Myers, who joined the team in 1988, was an outstanding staff member,” states Willis. “She could sign and quickly became an interpreter for me. Even though it all started out as fun, I applaud her work and skill.”

Willis left TAM and Maryland Relay in 2003. He has since retired and is currently enjoying his life post-retirement.



*Willis Mann celebrating the one-year birthday of Maryland Relay Service.*

**Be on the lookout for a video account of Willis Mann’s story, and other stories from past TAM members, at [MDRelay.org](http://MDRelay.org) and on [Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711).**



# MAT Program Completes First Call with CF Service

On December 17, 2021, the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program completed its first call using the Communication Facilitator (CF) service. The interaction took place at the home of Ann Black, who is DeafBlind, with the assistance of two facilitators, Meredith DeSomma and Rebecca Blumenfeld. The facilitators provided Ann with contextual information and what was said during a Zoom call through tactile sign language—which is signed into the hands of the person who is DeafBlind—and pro-tactile language—which is touch-based and provides a person who is DeafBlind with more reliable information about the visual elements of the environment. With pro-tactile language, the facilitators were able to share with Ann details like where people were sitting or standing and if they laughed, nodded, created hand gestures, and more.



*The communication facilitator (left) working with Ann Black.*

***“The MAT program is excited to continue providing the CF service to Marylanders who are DeafBlind and are seeking more efficient ways to stay connected.”***

**Kevin Steffy, MAT Manager**

Before the start of the CF service, the MAT program hosted a CF training on November 21, 2021. This valuable training was held at the Maryland Deaf Community Center in Frederick. On the day of the training, 22 participants arrived to learn how to be a communication facilitator. Four volunteers—who were DeafBlind individuals—and eight CDIs assisted the MAT team during the training.

“The MAT program is excited to continue providing the CF service to Marylanders who are DeafBlind and seeking more efficient ways to stay connected,” shares MAT Manager Kevin Steffy. “After our CF training, we’re confident that the CF service will be a steadfast calling solution for our clients.”



*Ann Black (left) using the CF service from MAT.*

**To learn more about the CF service and future CF trainings,** please contact MAT Manager Kevin Steffy at [Kevin.Steffy@Maryland.gov](mailto:Kevin.Steffy@Maryland.gov) or MAT Specialist Jane Hager at [Jane.Hager@Maryland.gov](mailto:Jane.Hager@Maryland.gov).

# Winter Updates From the Maryland Relay Outreach Team

Our three outreach coordinators have enjoyed attending in-person events, sharing vital information about Maryland Relay's services, and connecting with Marylanders throughout the state these past few months. Here's a quick glimpse at each of their recent travels.

## Rebecca Miller, Real-Time Text Outreach Coordinator

Rebecca presented to the National Emergency Number Association's (NENA) Joint Committee Meeting about Real-Time Text (RTT) services. Her presentation at the virtual summit got the attention of many key players in the organization who had limited knowledge of what RTT is and how it will be critical for 911 accessibility in the near future.

Rebecca also attended the Long Green Volunteer Fire Company Craft Fair and the Aberdeen Whoville Craft Fair during the 2021 holiday season. Not only was she able to share information about Maryland Relay and RTT with attendees, but she also created a beautifully-decorated tree for the Aberdeen Whoville Craft Fair's Festival of Trees.

## Jenny Pearson, Captioned Telephone Outreach Coordinator

Jenny's outreach travels include visiting the Richard Clark Senior Center in Charles County for a Veterans Day event in November 2021. With many veterans and older adults experiencing difficulty hearing, the event allowed Jenny to meet with the senior center's members and inform them about Maryland Relay's accessible calling solutions for the Hard of Hearing community.

In December, Jenny journeyed to the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Hotel in Cambridge for the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) Winter Conference. Called *Time to Reboot: Tomorrow's Tech Today*, the conference was an excellent opportunity to network with other leaders to discuss and learn how county



Rebecca Miller's outreach table at the Long Green Volunteer Fire Company Craft Fair and decorated tree for Aberdeen Whoville Craft Fair's Festival of Trees.

governments can do a better job of utilizing technology for remote work, virtual learning opportunities, and more.

Lastly, in February, Jenny gave a presentation to the Westside Networking Group—made up of representatives from libraries, businesses, and agencies in west Baltimore County. The group learned about MAT and assistive telecommunications equipment, how to place and receive a call through Maryland Relay, Maryland Relay Partner, and more.

### **Tarita Turner, Telecommunications Relay Services Outreach Coordinator**

Tarita had the opportunity to attend the grand opening of the Maryland Deaf Community Center in Frederick in October 2021. She had an outreach table at the exciting event, alongside the MAT team, and was able to meet with many individuals who will frequent the center. She even donated an item for the event's silent auction!



*Tarita Turner at the DORS Conference in November 2021.*

Tarita also gave a presentation on Speech-to-Speech services for the Stroke Survivors Support Group in Towson and collaborated with MAT team members, Jane Hager and Kevin Steffy, for a presentation at the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) Conference in November 2021.

Last, but certainly not least, she met and spoke with Delegate Lewis of Baltimore City and her staff about Remote Conference Captioning (RCC)—sharing how it makes conference calls more user-friendly for those who are hard of hearing.



*Jenny Pearson at MACo's Winter Conference.*



**Want to get in touch with our outreach coordinators to schedule a customized presentation or invite them to your next event? Send them a message!**

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# The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Announces Text-To-9-8-8

According to a press release distributed by the FCC on November 18, 2021, the commission approved the notion that covered text providers will be required to allow Americans to text the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline through the 9-8-8 number starting on July 16, 2022. In the past, individuals were able to dial 9-8-8 to reach the lifeline when they needed mental health support. With the new texting capability, more people will be able to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and receive its services—even when they cannot complete a call.



## To read the FCC's Report and Order—

"Enabling Text-to-9-8-8 Access to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline"—and the full press release, please visit [FCC.gov/Document/FCC-Approves-Text-988-Access-Suicide-Prevention-Lifeline](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-approves-text-988-access-suicide-prevention-lifeline).

Source: [FCC.gov/Document/FCC-Approves-Text-988-Access-Suicide-Prevention-Lifeline](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-approves-text-988-access-suicide-prevention-lifeline)

## On This Day in History: The Beginning of 7-1-1 in Maryland

Did you know Maryland Relay was the first state in the U.S. to dial 7-1-1 to place a Relay call?

According to the Maryland State Archives, February 1, 1999 marked the beginning of the 7-1-1 service, which was provided at no cost to Marylanders at the time by Bell Atlantic. This was a major communications update for people who were Deaf, hard of hearing, or had difficulty speaking, and needed to stay connected through Maryland Relay.

Now, when you dial 7-1-1 to make a call to your loved one, friend, neighbor, doctor, or coworker, you'll remember the innovative efforts of Maryland Relay.



Visit [MDRelay.org](https://MDRelay.org) to learn more about making important calls with Maryland Relay!

# Communication Word Search

Search for the communication-related words on the right sidebar and highlight your finds in the word search. Good luck!

S H V D R D N A L Y R A M N  
A P A B R A I L L E O C A O  
N C E R G N I N O I T P A C  
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Hard of Hearing  
Deaf  
Connected  
Tablets  
Equipment  
Braille  
Speech-to-Speech  
Accessible  
Maryland  
Captioning  
Technology  
Amplified  
Relay  
Assistive  
MAT

Created on [TheWordSearch.com](https://www.thewordsearch.com)

## Updates From The Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR)

During the most recent GABTR meeting on January 14, 2022, TAM Director David Bahar shared that there are currently three open seats on the board. These positions include the DeafBlind representative, the Maryland Commission on Disabilities (MCOB) representative, and the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) representative.

This opportunity would allow three individuals to join GABTR and assist with providing crucial feedback and insight on the issues that affect

Relay users—including quality and trends in Relay services, technology, and community outreach—to TAM and Maryland Relay.

Any interested candidates can contact the Governor's Appointment Office to receive a GABTR application. For any questions, individuals can contact GABTR Vice President Darrin Smith at [MrDarrinRSmith@gmail.com](mailto:MrDarrinRSmith@gmail.com) or Maryland Relay Manager Travis Dougherty at [Travis.Dougherty@Maryland.gov](mailto:Travis.Dougherty@Maryland.gov). The Board asks that all emails include GABTR in the subject line.



# Telecommunications Access of Maryland

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## Check Out Our Latest Telecommunications Equipment Donation



Maryland Relay Manager Travis  
Dougherty with Samuel E. Jones.

Recently, Maryland Relay Manager Travis Dougherty picked up another historic TTY donation to add to our telecommunications museum collection. Thank you to Samuel E. Jones of Silver Spring for the awesome contribution!

Our team is still in the process of collecting equipment for our museum, and we would love your help! If you would like to donate a device, please e-mail [MoreInfo@MDRelay.org](mailto:MoreInfo@MDRelay.org) with your name, location, and information about the device that you'd like to donate. We appreciate the continued support in educating the community about these devices!



**Ready to Donate? E-mail  
[MoreInfo@MDRelay.org](mailto:MoreInfo@MDRelay.org)  
to get started.**