

CONNECTION

SUMMER 2021



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

**Meet the newest
member of the
TAM team.**

See page 4 to learn more!

**Our outreach team is
returning to in-person
events!**

Learn more on page 5.



Telecommunications Access of Maryland Celebrates First Anniversary of Joining MDOD with Virtual Town Hall

July 1, 2021, marked the one-year anniversary of Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) transitioning to the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD). In honor of the anniversary, and to be completely transparent with our community, TAM and the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) hosted a virtual town hall on June 12.

The event allowed us to share updates on current projects that are underway, as well as the successes made in 2020 and in the beginning of 2021.

The town hall began with a critical telecommunication update about Remote Conference Captioning (RCC). This service can now be used through Maryland Relay, allowing individuals with hearing loss to access captioning during conference calls or virtual meetings—so they may actively participate and follow along.

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Telecommunications Access of Maryland Celebrates First Anniversary of Joining MDOD with Virtual Town Hall, continued

TAM also announced the hiring of new team members, including Finance Director Leslie Hannibal, and other stand-out employees like Real-Time Text Outreach Coordinator Rebecca Miller, Maryland Relay Community Outreach Manager Donna Broadway-Callaman, and MAT Evaluator Jane Hager.

Additionally, the virtual event shared that this transition has been nothing but beneficial for the agency and its partners. Our relationships

with the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Maryland Commission on Disabilities have improved with the addition of board members from each agency. With these resources, TAM can continue the legacy of building a better, more accessible Maryland for everyone.

Our first town hall was a positive experience, and we look forward to seeing what the future holds.

Learn more about TAM at MDRelay.org

The Americans with Disabilities Act Turns 31!

July 26 marked the 31st anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This act set the foundation on which Maryland Relay was built. The ADA prohibits any form of discrimination based on disability and requires covered employers to provide accommodations to any employees with disabilities. It also made requirements for public accommodations, including establishing Relay service in every state. This much-needed bill was introduced to Congress in 1988, and on July 26, 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed it into existence.

Technology has significantly evolved since that day 31 years ago, and today telecommunication is more vital and offers more options than ever before. Maryland Relay has taken every measure to ensure we continue to live up to the liberties granted by the ADA, ensuring all Marylanders have equal access to the most advanced telecommunication solutions.



Here's to another year of communication made easier by the ADA and Maryland Relay! Learn more at ADA.gov.

TikTok Introduces Auto-Captioning

TikTok is one of the newest social media platforms sweeping the globe. This app allows people to create and share short, entertaining videos, and it's known to be incredibly captivating. However, until recently, TikTok lacked automatic captioning, which made the app less accessible to individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing. While TikTok creators have the option of typing out captions for their videos, many do not — either because it takes too much time and effort, or they believe captions cover up their videos. But to viewers who are Deaf and hard of hearing, captions are a necessary feature, and fortunately, TikTok is now taking steps to improve.

On April 6, 2021, TikTok announced it will introduce auto-captioning on a trial basis. Some of TikTok's creators will have access to this new function while they are in the app's Video Editor. This beta feature will take what is spoken in the video and automatically generate captions. The creator can edit these captions for accuracy and move them around the video screen — taking much of the work off the creator's shoulders. And viewers will have the option of turning captions on or off.



Maryland Relay Manager Travis Dougherty is an avid TikTok creator, and he uses the popular platform to share engaging, educational, and fun content for his viewers. “This accessibility update will make a world of difference for TikTok users and creators alike,” says Dougherty. “Now the app will be more user-friendly, allowing more people to enjoy, create, and share.”

In addition to improving captions, TikTok is planning to implement other accessibility features, including text-to-speech, photosensitivity notifications, and animated thumbnails.



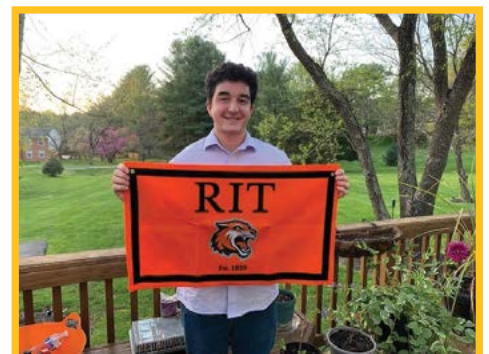
Maryland Relay is on social media! Follow us at

[Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711) [@MDRelay711](https://twitter.com/MDRelay711)

Congratulations to the 2021 Hamilton Relay High School Scholarship Winner, Andrew Photinakis

Each year, Hamilton Relay presents an opportunity for high school seniors who are Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking to apply for a scholarship to benefit their continued education.

This year's recipient in Maryland is Andrew Photinakis. Andrew will be majoring in computer science at the Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences at Rochester Institute of Technology this fall! We congratulate Andrew on his accomplishments and wish him continued success in his future endeavors.



Telecommunications Access of Maryland Welcomes Leslie Hannibal to the Team



The Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) team is pleased to introduce Leslie Hannibal as our newest member! As finance manager, Leslie is responsible for supervising the financial operations of TAM and its programs, Maryland Relay and the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program. Leslie has 20 years of accounting experience in the private sector, and his professional expertise includes working at United Technologies as an intercompany analyst in the finance department and serving four years with the State of Maryland as an advanced

accountant and accounting specialist.

“I look forward to working closely with Leslie to develop and maintain budgets for TAM and its programs,” shares David Bahar, director of TAM.

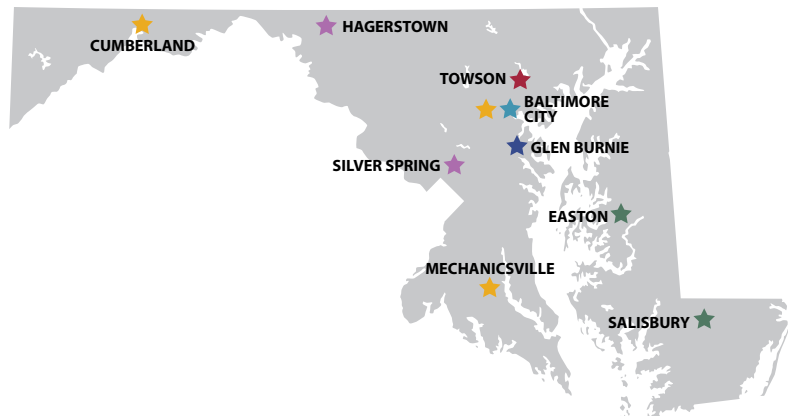
“With his vast experience and excellent attention to detail, I know Leslie will be an asset to our team.” Welcome to TAM, Leslie! We look forward to working with you.

Maryland Accessible Telecommunications Evaluations Now Available In-person, In-home, or Virtually

We’re happy to share that evaluations for the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program are being offered in-person at our evaluation centers. Once your MAT application is approved, you may schedule an evaluation at the center nearest you. Our current locations include:

- ★ **Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM)**, located in Baltimore City
- ★ **Independent Marylanders Achieving Growth through Empowerment (IMAGE) Center of Maryland**, located in Towson
- ★ **Accessible Resources for Independence**, located in Glen Burnie
- ★ **Easterseals**, located in Hagerstown and Silver Spring
- ★ **MAC, Inc.**, located in Salisbury and Easton
- ★ **Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MD TAP)**, located in Baltimore City, Cumberland, and Mechanicsville

For MAT clients who are unable to travel or who are uncomfortable coming to an evaluation center, we are also offering in-home evaluations. While in a client’s home, MAT evaluators are wearing masks and maintaining six feet of distance. And virtual evaluations are also still available by request for applicants who prefer not to interact in-person. To ensure the health, safety, and comfort of every MAT applicant, we are committed to completing evaluations in the setting that works best for each individual and their needs!



For more information, contact Kevin Steffy, MAT manager, at Kevin.Steffy@Maryland.gov or (410) 246-4418, (443) 852-6717 (text only).

Outreach Coordinators Reaching Out

The world is opening up again, and our outreach team is ready to jump right back into it. Our outreach coordinators have been out and about, serving our community as much as possible. Wonder what they've been up to? Here's a sneak peek!

Jenny Pearson, Captioned Telephone Outreach Coordinator

- On July 22, Jenny trained Maryland Access Point employees so they can refer clients to Maryland Relay if they need telecommunications support
- On July 26, she presented a virtual webinar to all Frederick County Senior Center members
- On August 10-12, Jenny will be visiting the Waldorf, Richard Clark, Nanjemoy, and Indian Head senior centers

Rebecca Miller, Real-Time Text (RTT) Outreach Coordinator

- Rebecca has been giving presentations to Maryland Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) about RTT
- She has also been attending National Emergency Number Association work groups and 911 board meetings
- Currently, she's distributing RTT educational resources in the community, so individuals can prepare for RTT calls from Relay users

Tarita Turner, Telecommunication Relay Services Outreach Coordinator

- Tarita planned the 2021 Hamilton Relay Scholarship celebration
- She represented Maryland Relay at the Maryland Municipal League's Summer 2021 Conference—where she met Governor Larry Hogan and First Lady Yumi Hogan



TRS Outreach Coordinator Tarita Turner with Maryland's First Lady Yumi Hogan.



Tarita Turner meeting Maryland Governor Larry Hogan.

Contact Our Outreach Team:

Jenny.Pearson@HamiltonRelay.com

Rebecca.Miller@HamiltonRelay.com

Tarita.Turner@HamiltonRelay.com

Nominate a Deaf Community Leader

During National Deaf Awareness Week in September, Hamilton Relay recognizes peer-nominated individuals who are Deaf and have made a significant impact in their community.

To nominate someone from your state for the **2021 Deaf Community Leadership Award**, visit HamiltonRelay.com/Deaf-Community-Leadership-Awards/Nominations.html today.

The Emergency Broadband Benefit: What It Is and How It Benefits Marylanders

Remember the days of commuting to work? While the shift to remote work during the pandemic made many people's lives a little easier, many people found it difficult to stay connected in a completely virtual world. To ensure everyone has access to the web, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) created the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB). EBB is a program that works with select internet providers to offer temporary discounts on monthly broadband bills for qualifying low-income households.

3 Steps to Get Connected with the Emergency Broadband Benefit:



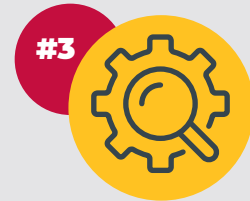
Check If You Qualify:

Visit [GetEmergencyBroadband.org](https://www.getemergencybroadband.org) to see if your household fits into any eligible categories



Apply for the Emergency Broadband Benefit:

Choose how you want to apply and submit necessary documents



Find a Broadband Provider Near You:

Use the EBB search tool to find a company that offers discounts

Learn more at [GetEmergencyBroadband.org](https://www.getemergencybroadband.org)

Congratulations! 16 Years of Service and Dedication from Betty Dodds-Putkovich

TAM is proud to honor Betty Dodds-Putkovich as a community leader for many reasons. From her dedication to the Deaf and disability communities to chairing the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) for more than a decade, she has shown true leadership and passion for the well-being of Maryland's citizens. Because of her work, we've been able to build a strong and enduring foundation for Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM)—helping more Marylanders make life-changing connections each day.



TAM Director David Bahar, and Maryland Relay staff members, Donna Broadway-Callaman and Travis Dougherty, had the honor of presenting Betty with an award for her distinguished leadership through her 16 years of service for GABTR.

Congratulations and many thanks, Betty!

Left to right: Donna Broadway-Callaman, Betty Dodds-Putkovich, David Bahar, and Travis Dougherty.

Deaf Community Featured in TV Commercials From Google, Facebook, and Amazon

You may have noticed that several large, recognizable brands have recently chosen to feature members of the Deaf community in their television ads.

In Google's "A CODA Story," which debuted during the Super Bowl, a man named Tony shares his story about being raised as a Child of Deaf Adults (CODA), and how Google apps such as Google Meet help him stay connected with his parents—especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.



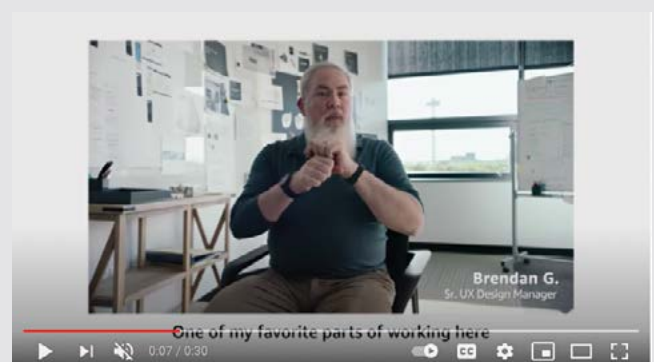
Watch A Coda Story on the official Google YouTube account.



In Facebook's "DeafHoops," a group of basketball players who are Deaf share how they use Facebook Groups to organize games, send training videos to each other, and most importantly, stay united as a team.

Check out Facebook Groups: Deaf Hoops on the official Facebook App YouTube account.

Amazon's "Meet Brendan" tells the story of one of their staff members who is Deaf and his experience being in a family that is Deaf too. Brendan shares his role and real-life experience as an employee who is Deaf, and how he is working with Amazon to create a more inclusive workplace.



Meet Brendan on the official Amazon YouTube Account.

It is encouraging to see the Deaf community prominently showcased in these highly visible ads, and to see these individuals share their personal stories with the world.



Telecommunications Access of Maryland

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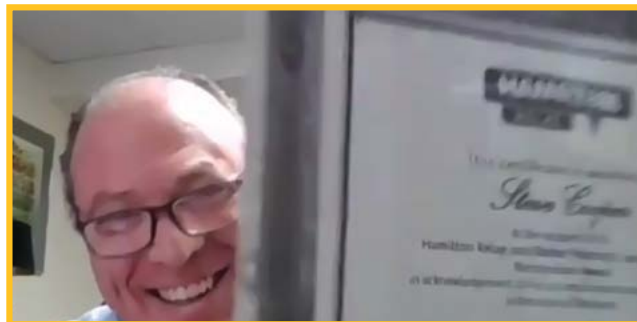
 [Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711)

 [Twitter.com/MDRelay711](https://twitter.com/MDRelay711)

Meet the Newest GABTR Member and 2021 Better Hearing and Speech Month Recognition Award Winner

Say hello to one of our newest members of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR), Steven Cooper. Steven is serving on GABTR as the Limited Speech Representative. After being diagnosed with cancer of the larynx and having a total laryngectomy in February 2019, Steven was referred to the MAT program. After his evaluation, he was offered several options that would allow him to communicate via telephone once again. During that process, Steven was invited to get involved with GABTR. "Looking at the board a little closer, I saw there was an open position for the Limited Speech Representative," shares Steven. "I instantly realized that I wanted to contribute!"

As a member of GABTR, Steven hopes to offer valuable insight and input to help others. "I am looking forward to supporting the mission of GABTR," he adds. "In short, I hope to pay back the help that I received from so many individuals and do what I can to help others moving forward."



In addition to his role with GABTR, Steven is also Maryland's recipient of the 2021 Better Hearing and Speech Month Recognition Award from Hamilton Relay! He was recognized by his peers for his leadership and volunteerism and was presented the award in June at the Montgomery County Laryngectomee Club's virtual meeting.

In his free time, Steven enjoys yard work, tinkering and fixing things around the house, playing tennis, and biking. But what he enjoys most is the opportunity to help and mentor others in the laryngectomy community.