



**GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY BOARD FOR
TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY**

MARTIN O'MALLEY
Governor

ANTHONY BROWN
Lieutenant Governor

MITCHELL D. TRAVERS
Chair

January 1, 2010

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:

In accordance with § 3A-503(d) of the State Finance and Procurement Article, I am pleased to submit the annual Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) report for calendar year 2009.

The members of GABTR, Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) staff, and representatives from Hamilton Relay, the current Maryland Relay contracted provider, meet in various Maryland counties three times a year to report and discuss the latest trends in relay services, technology, and outreach efforts that affect Maryland citizens. During GABTR meetings, TAM staff updates the GABTR and visitors regarding any regulatory updates from the FCC that may impact TAM's future fiscal and or operational obligations for current and newer modes of relay. These meetings provide an interactive venue for GABTR and TAM to solicit feedback on quality of service and the communications needs of the Deaf, hard of hearing and speech-disabled communities we serve through our TRS and Captioned Phone Relay Services and the equipment distribution program managed by TAM.

In fiscal year 2009, TAM weathered two significant impacts to its fiscal position. In April, the Universal Service Trust Fund (USTF) surcharge was reduced from \$.20 to \$.18 per landline by the Public Service Commission. In addition, 2009 legislation reduced TAM's fund balance by \$5 million through the enactment of a Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) and

reallocating it to the General Funds to the Maryland School for the Deaf. GABTR understands that an additional BRFA of at least \$6 million is expected in fiscal year 2010.

GABTR, as well as members of the Deaf, hard of hearing and speech disabled communities, share concerns regarding the impact of these actions. While TAM and its programs are operated under special funds and remain solvent at this time, we are concerned over the possible negative impact on TAM's ability to continue to provide the high standard of services that the citizens of Maryland have come to know. Chief among these concerns is a looming mandate on the horizon whereby the Federal Communications Commission may delegate the fiscal liability for provision of alternative relay services, such as Internet and Video Relay to the State. This burden, imposed upon TAM's reduced fund balance, together with declining revenue due to the lower number of landlines contributing to the USTF at the recently reduced rate may necessitate that increased revenues be found to fulfill the new obligations in a relatively short amount of time. If so, the Public Service Commission and GABTR may need to recommend that the Department of Information Technology/TAM propose legislation to increase the USTF cap on the land-line telephone surcharge or to seek other revenue streams such as imposing a surcharge on inter-connected VoIP and wireless services.

GABTR looks forward to working with the TAM office to continue to provide exemplary services to the citizens of Maryland.

Sincerely,



Mitchell D. Travers
Chair

cc: The Honorable Elliot H. Schlanger, Secretary, DoIT
Patrick Frank, Policy Analyst, DLS
Brenda Kelly-Frey, Director, TAM