January 1, 2018

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 Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) annual report for calendar year 2017.

Consistent with Governor Hogan's Customer Service Promise, the members of GABTR continue to partner with Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) staff to ensure TAM's programs produce friendly and courteous, timely and responsible, accurate and consistent, accessible and convenient, and truthful and transparent customer service. Actions to accomplish those goals have included, but are not limited to, increased outreach efforts, increased communication with customers, and release of an RFP for MAT evaluation services that has the goal of doubling the number of evaluation centers throughout the State.

In 2017, members of GABTR, TAM staff, and representatives from the current Maryland Relay provider, Hamilton, met three times in various Maryland counties to discuss our TAM managed programs – the Maryland Relay, the Maryland Captioned Telephone Relay Service, the Newsline Reading Service for the Blind and the Maryland Accessible Telecommunication (MAT) equipment distribution programs. During two of the three public meetings, outside professionals were brought in to address two trending topics. They were Dr. Christian Vogler, Director of the Technology Access Program at Gallaudet who spoke about Real Time Text (RTT) and Kristie Dutrow of Frederick County's Emergency Management Division who spoke about Text-to-911. Dr. Vogler explained RTT and its potential applications as well as performing a demo of how RTT could be made backwards compatible to a TTY. Ms. Dutrow explained how Text-to-911 works in Frederick County, shared success stories, and allowed board members to send test texts to the 911 center. The board is looking forward to seeing Text-to-911 implemented statewide.

In September 2016, Governor Hogan announced the kick off of the addition of digital tablets to the MAT program. 2017 was the first full year of the program, during which time about 400 Maryland residents with disabilities were loaned tablets for telecommunication purposes. These tablets were distributed to individuals who are Deaf, Deaf Blind, Hard of Hearing, or are living with limited speech, mobility, or cognitive abilities. Before the addition of tablets, some of these populations had been severely underserved by the MAT program. One woman shared with her evaluator that before receiving her tablet she never had the independence to make calls on her own, thus no privacy. Through tears, she expressed much appreciation for the program and noted the tablet had changed her life. GABTR members are excited to see the amazing impact this program is making on individuals and their ability to stay or become independent.

The Universal Service Trust Fund (USTF) surcharge stayed at $.05 throughout the entirety of 2017. This rate still covers the cost of the programs currently being provided by DoIT/TAM; however, TAM understands that the FCC may transition the payment of IP services to states, which will significantly change program costs at that time. In addition, beginning in Fiscal Year 2019, the USTF will also be paying for the Senior Call Check Program.

Keeping these issues in the forefront, GABTR looks forward to working with the TAM office to continue providing exemplary services to the citizens of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Betty Jean Dodds

Betty Jean Dodds
Chair

cc: The Honorable Michael G Leahy, Acting Secretary, DoIT
        Brenda Kelly-Frey, Director, TAM
        Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services