

# CONNECTION

SUMMER 2026



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**



**Our New Website Is Live**

We're thrilled to announce that our brand-new website has officially launched. After months of careful work, we've built a digital home that reflects our commitment to accessibility and ease of use, so you can spend less time searching and more time getting what you need.

"Designed with you in mind, the updated site makes it easier than ever to explore all the Maryland Relay resources we offer." —David Bahar, TAM Executive Director

The redesigned site brings together updated content, improved navigation, and a cleaner layout so every visitor can quickly find what they're looking for. Whether you're a first-time visitor or a returning user, the experience has been thoughtfully improved from top to bottom.



Visit **MDOD.Maryland.gov/TAM** to explore our new site.

**2026 Community Access Grant Recipients Announced**

*Read more on page 7.*

**Accessible Summer Events to Add to Your Calendar**

*Save the dates on page 11!*

## Important Service Notices

Non-internet Captioned Telephones will not be supported through Maryland Relay after **June 30, 2026**.

Relay Conference Captioning (RCC) will no longer be offered by Maryland Relay after **June 30, 2026**. Any requests scheduled after that date will not be honored.

Please direct any questions to **MDRelay@HamiltonRelay.com**.





## MAT Program FAQs: Everything You Need to Know About Applying

### What is the MAT program?

The MAT program provides assistive telecommunications equipment at no cost to qualified Maryland residents who have difficulty using a standard telephone. It is a service of Maryland Relay, administered by Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM).

### Who should apply?

Any Maryland resident age three or older who has difficulty using a standard telephone is encouraged to apply. This includes people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, DeafBlind, have low vision, have difficulty speaking, have limited mobility, or experience memory loss or other cognitive challenges. Even if you don't qualify for state-provided equipment, you'll still receive a free, personalized evaluation to explore your options.

### What kind of equipment does the program provide?

The MAT program offers a wide variety of solutions—large-button and high-contrast phones for low-vision users, picture phones for those with memory loss, hands-free phones and wheelchair pad switches for limited mobility, and TTY or Hearing Carry-Over (HCO) phones for those with difficulty speaking.

### How do I apply?

You can download a paper application or apply online. Visit the Application Process page on our website for step-by-step instructions. If you are applying on behalf of a loved one, complete the application in their name and include your own contact information.

### How will I know if I'm approved?

A notification letter will be mailed to you approximately two weeks after your completed application is received. If you are approved, the letter will include information on how to schedule your free evaluation with a MAT specialist.



### How do I get my equipment?

Once your free evaluation is complete, your equipment will be ordered and shipped directly to your home via UPS. If you have not received your package, contact the MAT program at **800-552-7724** or **410-767-6960 (Voice/TTY)** or **443-453-5970 (Video Phone)**.

### Will I receive training?

Yes. Initial training is provided during your free evaluation, and personalized setup and usage instructions are included with your equipment shipment. You may also contact your MAT evaluator at any time for additional free training. The Talk, Text, Train (TTT) program offers one-on-one sessions specifically for blind and low-vision customers.

### What if my equipment stops working?

Call the MAT program at **800-552-7724** or **410-767-6960 (Voice/TTY)** right away. Most program-issued equipment comes with a warranty—check the documentation included in your shipment for details.

### Ready to get started?

Start your application today at **[MDRelay.Maryland.gov/TAM](https://MDRelay.Maryland.gov/TAM)**.

## Congratulations to Josiah Lockhart, Recipient of the Hamilton Relay Scholarship



Hamilton Relay, Telecommunications Relay and Captioned Telephone Service provider for the state of Maryland, has awarded a \$1,000 college scholarship to Josiah Lockhart, a student at Maryland School for the Deaf in Urbana, Maryland. The scholarship opportunity is available to high school seniors who are Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking. A recipient is selected within each of the states where Hamilton Relay is the contracted service provider; this is one of several ways the company gives back to the communities it serves.

“Hamilton Relay takes pride in recognizing outstanding leadership and promoting education,” says Connor Fitzsimmons, Maryland Relay outreach coordinator. “We are excited to have the opportunity to contribute to furthering Josiah’s education, and we wish him success in reaching his personal and professional goals.”

Josiah, was awarded the Hamilton Relay Scholarship after completing the application process, including writing an essay on the topic of communication technology. Josiah plans to attend Gallaudet University this fall to study architecture.

That's what I'm talking about



### Learn More About Hamilton Relay

Hamilton Relay provides contracted Traditional Relay and Captioned Telephone services in 36 states, the District of Columbia, and the Island of Saipan, and is a provider of Internet-based Captioned Telephone services nationwide.

Visit **[HamiltonRelay.com](https://HamiltonRelay.com)** for more information.



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

## Did You Know the History Behind the Call You Just Made?

From a volunteer running a relay service out of a church to Maryland making national history with a three-digit phone number, the story of Telecommunications Access of Maryland is one of advocacy, independence, and community. Here's a look back at how it all began.

### **Volunteer Roots (1970s – 1980s)**

Long before Maryland Relay was a 24-hour professional service, telecommunications access for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community depended almost entirely on volunteers. Across the country, roughly 50 privately run relay centers operated under the name Contact USA, kept alive by early technology pioneers who donated TTY equipment and repair services.

In the Mid-Atlantic region, Esther Schaffer founded the Telecommunications Exchange for the Deaf, Inc. (TEDI) in Virginia. It was a volunteer-run center with limited hours, 15-minute call caps, and no guarantee of privacy.

In Maryland, Willis Mann expanded a suicide prevention hotline into a local relay service before eventually heading west to open a 23-county relay service in California on a \$15,000 grant. His work laid the foundation for what Maryland would eventually build.

### **The Fight for Privacy and Professionalism**

Advocates Paul Singleton and Al Sonnelstrahn brought the issue directly to the state government, making a simple but powerful argument: a Deaf person placing a sensitive call shouldn't have to worry that the volunteer relaying it is a neighbor, a colleague, or an acquaintance. The system needed trained, professional staff and guaranteed confidentiality.

The state agreed. Willis Mann was hired as the first director, then a larger budget was secured, and Maryland began building a professional, around-the-clock service.

### **From Program to Institution (1988 – 1991)**

In 1988, the program took its first official form as the Telecommunications for Disabled Individuals Program (TDIP) under the Department of Human Resources. Two years later, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, requiring all states to provide relay services by 1993. Maryland was already ahead of the curve.

Through House Bill 853 in 1991, the program was officially renamed Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM), transferred to the Department of General Services, and launched as a true 24-hour service. The General Assembly authorized a 45-cent monthly surcharge on Maryland phone bills to fund a \$13.5 million first-year budget. Gil Becker was named the first Director of the newly established Maryland Relay.

### **Maryland Makes History (1999)**

On February 8, 1999, Maryland became the first state in the continental United States to offer 7-1-1 relay dialing, and the response was immediate.

Within the first month, call volumes jumped 12%. After two months, 41% of all relay traffic was coming through 7-1-1. Perhaps most remarkably, calls from hearing people increased by 23%. For the first time, hearing callers were actually returning relay calls, because a three-digit number was something they could remember.

The 7-1-1 launch proved what advocates had always known, which is that if we remove the barrier, people will connect. Through every



*Paul, Sally, and their son David along with one of the first teletypewriters that was repurposed as a telecommunication device for the deaf. Image via Rochester Institute of Technology*

legislative milestone, every technological upgrade, and every policy fight, one idea has remained at the heart of this program: “I won’t have to run next door to ask my neighbor to make a phone call for me,” said Willis Mann.

### **This History Belongs to All of Us**

TAM’s history is the story of real people who fought for the right to communicate privately, freely, and on their own terms—and that story is still being written with Maryland Relay users today.

We share pieces of this history and updates on what’s happening today regularly on our social media channels. Join the conversation, share these stories with someone who might not know them, and help us keep the community connected!




*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.*

Follow us on social media to stay up to date on program news, history highlights, and community resources.

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

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

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

# A Spotlight on the Communication Facilitator (CF) Service

The CF service is a MAT-administered program that provides equal access to communication for Marylanders who are DeafBlind. Through the assistance of a skilled Communication Facilitator, individuals who are DeafBlind can have real, natural conversations without having to rely on others to interpret or relay for them.

The service supports a wide range of communication methods, including American Sign Language, close-vision signing, tactile sign language, tracking, and whatever communication approach works best for the individual.

## How It Works

The CF service is built around video calls. A DeafBlind consumer connects with another person, a friend, a family member, a coworker, or a doctor, through any video platform they choose. That includes videophones (VP), Video Relay Services (VRS), FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, Google Meet, and more. No special platform is required.

During the call, a Communication Facilitator joins to bridge the gap. The CF is a skilled signer who watches the other video caller and conveys their communication directly to the DeafBlind individual, through close-vision signing, tactile sign language, tracking, or whichever method fits that person's needs. The conversation flows naturally, with the CF working in the background, so the focus stays on the people connecting.

CF service can be set up in a person's home or in another public space, giving participants flexibility in how and where they use it.

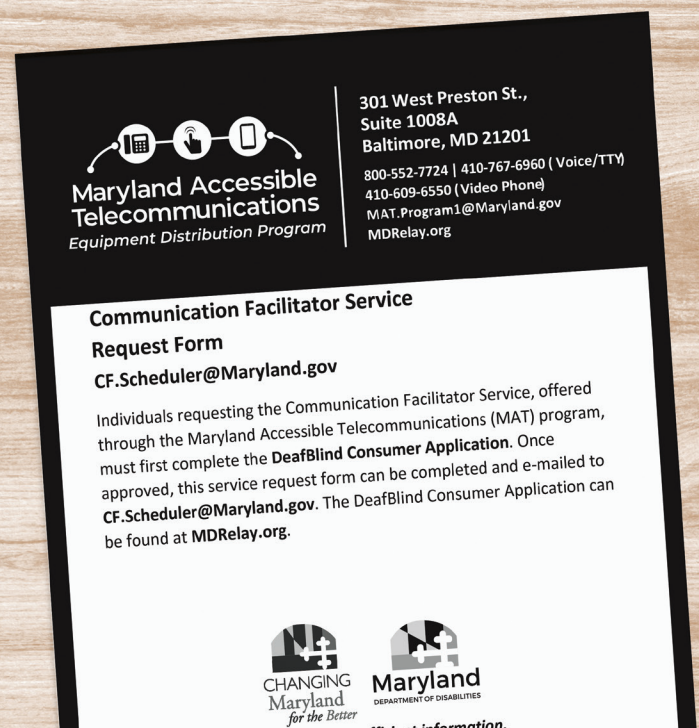
## Who Is It For?

The CF service is specifically designed for Marylanders who are DeafBlind. If you or someone you know has been navigating video calls, family conversations, or work meetings without adequate support, this service may be exactly what's needed.

## How to Get Started with the Two-Step CF Service Process:

1. First, complete and submit the Communication Facilitator Service DeafBlind Consumer Application and receive approval from the MAT program. This step establishes your eligibility for future CF services.
2. Once approved, you can then complete and submit the Communication Facilitator Service Request Form whenever you need to schedule the service for a call.

Both forms are available through the MAT program at [MDOD.Maryland.gov](https://www.mdod.maryland.gov).



The Communication Facilitator service is administered by Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM), a service of the Maryland Department of Disabilities. Learn more at [MDOD.Maryland.gov/TAM](https://www.mdod.maryland.gov/TAM) today.





## Spanish Relay Highlight

If Spanish is your primary language and you or someone you love has difficulty using a standard telephone, Maryland Relay has a service built specifically for you. Spanish Relay ensures that the language you're most comfortable speaking is never a barrier to staying connected.

### What Is Spanish Relay?

Spanish Relay is a fully bilingual relay service that allows Spanish-speaking users who are Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, or have difficulty speaking to make and receive phone calls entirely in Spanish. All of Maryland Relay's standard calling options are available through Spanish Relay, and bilingual Operators (OPRs) are ready to assist with Spanish-to-Spanish calls as well as Spanish-to-English translation when both parties are within the state.

### How It Works

When using Spanish Relay with a TTY, the process is straightforward: you type everything you want to say, and the bilingual Operator reads it aloud in Spanish to the person you're calling. When that person responds, the Operator types back everything they say so you can read it on your TTY screen. The conversation flows naturally, just as it would on any phone call, with the Operator working quietly in the background.

For voice-based relay options, bilingual Operators are equally available to process your call in Spanish, carrying your voice communication across to the other party with the same professionalism and confidentiality.

If you and the person you're calling are both within Maryland, the Operator can also facilitate a translated call, which bridges Spanish and English in real time so you can communicate freely with anyone, regardless of what language they speak.

### Know Someone Who Could Benefit?

Spanish Relay is a free, confidential, and fully accessible service—but only if people know it exists. If you know a Spanish-speaking family member, friend, neighbor, or community member who has difficulty using a standard telephone, please share this information with them. A phone call can make all the difference.

Dial **800-877-1264** for direct Spanish Relay access or dial **7-1-1** and ask for a Spanish-speaking operator.

# Bridging the Gap: Celebrating Excellence at the Ethan Saylor Alliance Awards

The Maryland Department of Disabilities recently hosted a moving ceremony to present the Ethan Saylor Alliance Awards, recognizing several dedicated law enforcement officers for their exceptional commitment to the intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) community.

Several law enforcement officers received official awards and Governor's Citations for

their proactive efforts in the field. These honorees were recognized for exceptional de-escalation, community building, and advocacy.

The Ethan Saylor Alliance was established with a vital mission: to improve communication and safety through better training. This year's event highlighted individuals who didn't just meet the standard—they set a new one.



# Maryland Relay Speech-to-Speech (STS) Service: How it Works and Who It's For

Unlike other Relay services that rely on typed text, STS allows you to use your own voice, a voice synthesizer, a voice enhancer, or other assistive device to have a natural two-way phone conversation with anyone. No special equipment is required on the other end of the line.

## Who Can Benefit from Speech-to-Speech?

STS is designed for anyone whose speech may be difficult for others to understand over the phone. This includes people living with a wide range of conditions, but among them are Cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease, stroke, stuttering, traumatic brain injury, and laryngectomy.

If you have any condition that affects the clarity of your speech and makes phone communication challenging, STS may be right for you. The service also extends to family members, caregivers, and healthcare providers who want to better understand what support is available for someone they care for.

## How It Works

The mechanics of STS are simple, and staying in control is built into every call. You speak using your own voice or an assistive device. The Maryland Relay Operator listens and re-voices what you say to the other person. As the other person responds, you listen to them directly without any Relay step in between.

Importantly, you decide how involved the Relay Operator is. You can instruct the Relay Operator to re-voice everything you say, or only to intervene when the other person seems to be having difficulty understanding. You can also ask the Relay Operator to mute your voice if needed.

As with all Maryland Relay services, the Relay Operator does not comment, participate in the conversation, or disclose any call content. Every STS call is fully confidential, and no records or recordings are kept.

## Need Help Getting Started?

If you'd like training on how to use STS or want to learn more before placing your first call, Maryland Relay offers a dedicated STS User Training Line:

**866-269-9006 (English)**

**866-744-7471 (Spanish)**

Assistive telecommunications equipment may also be available to you at no cost through the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program. Call **800-552-7724** or **410-767-6960 (Voice/TTY)** or visit **MDOD.Maryland.gov/TAM** to apply.



# Accessible Summer Events to Add to Your Calendar

**June 22 – 26**

## Youth Orioles Camp



Organized by the Maryland School for the Deaf Athletics Department, this camp is designed for Deaf and hard of hearing students, signing KODAs, and siblings from across Maryland who will be in Grades 1 – 6 during the 2026-27 school year. Welcoming all skill levels, the camp provides a supportive space where every camper can stay active, build skills, and have fun.

Visit [MSD.edu/Summer-Camps](https://MSD.edu/Summer-Camps) for more information.

**August 1**

## The Senior Olympics



Join the Howard County Office on Aging & Independence for a day of fun, fitness, and friendly competition. Express classes and games are the perfect way to stay active and enjoy the day! Registration is not required. Just show up ready to participate!

Go to [HowardCountyMD.gov/Aging-Independence](https://HowardCountyMD.gov/Aging-Independence) for details.

**August 15**

## Deaf Night Out

Be a part of the Baltimore City Association of the Deaf's Deaf Night Out at the Guinness Open Gate Brewery for laughter and community connection. Sign with new and familiar faces over a delicious pint and get to know others in the Deaf community.

Check out the full schedule at [BCAdeaf.org/Deaf-Night-Out](https://BCAdeaf.org/Deaf-Night-Out) for more dates.



## Recap of Winter Outreach Events



NFB Conference



Point View Aspen Hill Health Fair & AACF Lunar New Year



# Telecommunications Access of Maryland

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

 [X.com/MDRelay711](https://www.x.com/MDRelay711)

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

## Find the Connection

At Maryland Relay, we facilitate countless connections every day, all across the state. Try your hand at finding the common thread between the four words below and figure out the connection!

### Puzzle #1:

Season  
Coil  
Geyser  
Bounce

### Puzzle #2:

Army  
Fire  
Pharoah  
Carpenter

### Puzzle #3:

Cherry  
Flower  
Music Note  
Wine Glass