



# THE MARYLAND RELAY *Connection*

FALL 2016



## Just Announced: Tablets Now Available Through MAT!

We are excited to announce that tablets are now available through the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program! Governor Larry Hogan announced the launch of the new program in September.

“Our administration is focused on finding ways to improve the quality of life for all of our citizens,” said Governor Hogan in a press release. “The tablet program is just the latest example of how we are working to ensure that all Marylanders, regardless of disability, are able to communicate with ease—an ability that many of us take for granted.”

Maryland residents who are unable to use a standard telephone due to a disability and who meet specific financial requirements are eligible to apply for a tablet. After an evaluation, approved applicants receive a tablet from the State of Maryland that comes pre-loaded with applications specific to their needs—including video chat or Captioned Telephone programs—that assist with telecommunication.

“For a child or adult who has difficulty hearing or speaking, access to a tablet can make a significant difference in their ability to communicate successfully, whether at school, work, or home. So we are thrilled to now be able to offer tablets to people in our state who will greatly benefit from them,” said Brenda Kelly-Frey, director, Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM). “Maryland has always had one of the most advanced and comprehensive equipment distribution programs in the country, and as phone technology continues to shift from analog to



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Voice/TTY: 800-552-7724 or 410-767-6960

Fax: 410-767-4276

Video Phone: 443-453-5970

[mdrelay.org](http://mdrelay.org)



*You may notice that in our contact information, we include a Video Phone (VP) number. Video Phone enables individuals who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or who have difficulty speaking, to communicate with us over the phone using sign language. Video Phone users may speak with us using a live video feed by dialing 443-453-5970 (Video Phone).*

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more web-based solutions, it is vital that we update our equipment selection to include these tools. We thank Governor Hogan for his support of this initiative, and the Department of Information Technology for having the foresight to allow us to expand our program."

Qualified MAT applicants are those who have difficulty using a standard telephone due to their hearing status, speaking difficulties, low vision, low mobility, or cognitive factors. They must also meet specific financial requirements. Once approved, applicants must be evaluated at one of the six MAT Evaluation Centers located throughout the state to ensure they receive the equipment best suited to meet their individual needs.

**If you, or someone you know, want to apply for a tablet or assistive telephone through the MAT program, or would like more information, please visit [www.mdrelay.org](http://www.mdrelay.org) or contact Maryland Relay at 800-552-7724 (Voice/TTY), 410-767-6960 (Voice/TTY), or 443-453-5970 (Video Phone).**

# welcome to the Team!

We are happy to welcome two new members to the Maryland Relay team. Lisa Sharif-Chikiar is a student at Towson University who is pursuing her Bachelor's degree in Speech-Language Pathology and Deaf Studies. This semester, she is joining Maryland Relay as an intern and will be using her ASL skills as she works closely with Assistive Technology Administrator Kevin Steffy to conduct evaluations for the MAT program and the launch of tablets within the program.

Grace Gonzales is also interning with Maryland Relay this fall and joins us through the Maryland Department of Rehabilitation Services QUEST internship program. Grace, who has both vision and hearing loss, is helping with administrative work as she obtains meaningful work experience.

**If you visit the TAM office this fall, please say hello to Lisa and Grace and help us welcome them to our team!**

## New GABTR Members

The Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR) recently welcomed two new members. **Alex Simmons** represents the Maryland State Government and **Al Sonnenstrahl** represents the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Thank you to both Alex and Al for volunteering their time to support Maryland Relay!

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



Lisa Sharif-Chikiar



Grace Gonzales

# Maryland Hosts Two National Telecommunications Conferences

## Governor Hogan Proclaims First "Telecommunications for All Week" in Maryland

This September, two national telecommunications conferences were held in Annapolis: the Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program Association (TEDPA) conference and the National Association for State Relay Administration (NASRA) conference.

In honor of the conferences taking place in our state capital, Governor Larry Hogan proclaimed the week of September 11 through September 17, 2016 "Telecommunications for All Week" in Maryland. The proclamation reinforced the Hogan administration's commitment to expanding communications services to all citizens.

The NASRA conference brought together Relay administrators from states across the country to discuss the current issues, policies and new technologies impacting Relay users.

Representatives from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) were present to discuss their national outreach efforts, as well as the ongoing effort to make Text-to-911 service available nationwide.

Conference attendees shared their local outreach efforts and exchanged ideas to continue to raise awareness for Relay. There were even representatives from Relay services in New Zealand, Sweden, and Thailand



*Asia Johnson, Maryland Relay Outreach Coordinator, offers conference attendees "a taste of Maryland"*

present to compare and contrast telecommunications access initiatives in the United States and other parts of the world.

We thank both NASRA and TEDPA for hosting wonderful conferences, and visiting our beautiful state!



## Nyle DiMarco Honored in Maryland

Brenda Kelly-Frey, director of TAM, recently had the pleasure of meeting Dancing with the Stars Mirror Ball trophy winner and America's Next Top Model winner, Nyle DiMarco! Deaf since birth, Nyle grew up in Frederick and is one of more than 25 people who are Deaf in his family. Nyle visited the Annapolis State House in September to receive a citation from Governor Hogan commending his outstanding accomplishments, efforts, leadership and advocacy in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.



## Maryland Community Leaders Recognized with 2016 Awards

Maryland Relay's service provider, Hamilton Relay, enjoys the opportunity to give back to the communities it serves each year by recognizing leaders within each of the states where it is the contracted relay and/or captioned telephone service provider. This year, the following individuals were honored for their accomplishments and contributions to Maryland's Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities:



*Lauren Masterson*

### College Scholarship Recipient: Lauren Masterson

Lauren Masterson, a graduate of Fallston High School, was selected as Maryland's recipient of the 2016 Hamilton Relay High School Scholarship. As this year's winner, Lauren received \$500 to use towards her college education. The Hamilton Relay 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 is the contracted service provider and is one of several ways the company gives back to the communities they serve. A resident of Baldwin, Lauren is now attending West Virginia University to study Engineering.



*Robert Leepa and Maryland Relay Outreach Coordinator Renate Buttrum*

### Better Hearing and Speech Month Recognition Award: Robert Leepa

Robert Leepa of Ellicott City was chosen as Maryland's recipient of the 2016 Better Hearing and Speech Month Recognition Award. Robert has been an active member of the Hearing Loss Association of America – Greater Baltimore Chapter (HLAA-GBC) since 1998. In that time, Robert has served on the board, led the organization as president and served as secretary. Robert also organizes and promotes many activities and speakers for the group, as well as continually recruits new members.

In addition, Robert developed and distributed a hospital kit specifically designed to facilitate communication between medical personnel and patients with hearing loss. Robert is also very active in his church and enjoys spending time with his family.

# Leadership Maryland Visits Maryland Relay Center

This summer, the Maryland Relay Center in Frostburg was honored to welcome a group of members and guests from Leadership Maryland, a professional development program that educates local leaders on the state's most vital social, economic and environmental issues.

Our guests consisted of a mix of business, government, education and non-profit representatives. They were treated to demonstrations of how Maryland Relay Operators process Relay and Captioned Telephone calls, and a tour of the training room where Operators hone their skills.

Brenda Kelly-Frey, director of Telecommunication Access of Maryland (TAM), provided a history and overview of Maryland Relay and the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program, and shared her own experiences growing up as a child of Deaf parents.

Tracy Smith, manager at the Maryland Relay Center, presented the employment opportunities and benefits available at the center with contracted service provider, Hamilton Relay. The Center currently employs more than 200 individuals and is one of the largest employers in the area.

We thank Leadership Maryland for their interest in Maryland Relay!



## Operator Feedback

Here are a few tips from our Operators to keep in mind the next time you place a Maryland Relay call:

### Be Patient

If you are a Voice user (who is able to hear and speak clearly) on a call with a Maryland Relay user, please be patient at the beginning of the call. It takes a few seconds for the person on the other line to respond.

### Wait for the "Go Ahead"

Please remember to wait until you hear or read "Go Ahead" before beginning to respond. Replying too soon may interrupt the other person before they have finished speaking or typing.

Also, please remember to say "Go Ahead" each time you have finished typing or speaking. This lets the Operator know that you are ready for a reply. Expect a brief pause as the Operator relays your message to the other person.





## Telecommunications Access of Maryland

Maryland Dept. of Information Technology  
301 West Preston Street, Suite 1008A  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Look for Maryland Relay's Outreach Coordinators at these upcoming events. To see a complete list, visit [mdrelay.org](http://mdrelay.org):

### November 14

Frederick County Public Library  
C. Burr Artz Branch, Frederick

### December 1

BCDA Advocacy Conference,  
Hunt Valley Inn, Hunt Valley

### December 19

Harford County Public Library  
Abingdon Branch

### Save the Date:

**Next GABTR Meeting December 3**

**10 am–1 pm**

**Anne Arundel County**

The next meeting of the Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay will be held Saturday, December 3 at the Odenton Library (1325 Annapolis Road, Odenton, MD 21113) in Meeting Room A. This meeting is open to the public. Anyone is welcome to attend to learn more about our programs and services and offer feedback, suggestions and concerns.

**For more information, please contact the Maryland Relay office at 800-552-7724 (V/TTY) or visit our website at [mdrelay.org](http://mdrelay.org).**