

CONNECTION

SUMMER 2025



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

21st-Century Trailblazers

Learn about some of the fierce advocates of today on page 6.

Upcoming Communication Accessibility Summit

*An open call for submissions—
check out page 8 for more!*

Introducing Community Access Grants: 2025 Request for Applications is Now Open



In alignment with our mission of supporting equal access to telecommunications for those who are Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, DeafBlind, or have cognitive, mobility, or speech difficulties, Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) is making **\$20,000 of total grant funding available** for projects or initiatives that meet the communication and access needs of Marylanders. While TAM's primary focus remains to be telephone accessibility, this grant opportunity encourages broader approaches to communication and access challenges faced by our community. Grant awards will range from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

Our Current Cycle Grantees Include:

1. IMAGE Center for People with Disabilities for a "train-the-trainer" program to equip staff at designated centers for independent living with the skills needed to teach accessible communication to consumers who are blind or visually impaired.
2. Baltimore City Association of the Deaf (BCAD) to provide accessibility training for Baltimore County first responders and government agency staff.
3. Maryland Deaf Community Center (MDCC) to fund three workshops for individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing, including a workshop on Deaf Relay Services & New Technologies.

Continued on page 2 ►



Be a part of our next cycle of grantees!

Email More.Info@Maryland.gov to submit an application.

Use of Grant Funding

Grant proposals will be accepted for a variety of innovative programs, community initiatives, and activities that enhance communication access.

Examples include:

- **Technology literacy initiatives:** Training workshops or demonstrations on using Relay services or accessible telecommunications devices; curriculum development for basic telecommunication device accessibility for users who are blind or visually impaired
- **Public awareness campaigns:** Educational videos about communication accessibility in different facets of life; development of accessible communication tools or resources
- **Direct services:** Interpreters for specific community projects, events, or initiatives; Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services for local events

Applications for direct programming will be given preference over applications for administrative and organizational costs.

Complete applications must include:

- Organization information and primary contact details
- Project summary (maximum 250 words)
- Brief project description (maximum 2 pages) including:
 - What need you're addressing
 - Project goals and activities
 - Who will benefit from the project
 - Timeline of activities
- Simple budget outline showing how funds will be used

Eligibility

To be eligible, the applicant must be in good standing with the State Department of Assessments and Taxation (SDAT).

Grant Review

All grant applications will be vetted by TAM staff to determine initial eligibility and then by a Review Committee for final approval. Strong applicant submissions will:

- Include people with disabilities in project planning and implementation
- Propose practical solutions to communication barriers
- Present a reasonable budget
- Have a clear timeline and goals

Preference will be given to proposals that address unique or underserved needs within the community. Activities under the proposal must be completed by March 31, 2026.

Grant Requirements

The grant requires a brief programmatic and financial final report. Grantees should:

- Provide a simple accounting of how funds were used
- Summarize project activities and outcomes
- Share any materials developed for the project

Submitting pictures, videos, and testimonials is encouraged and may be posted on TAM's website or social media (with appropriate consent and releases). All communications related to the project must credit Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM). Successful projects may be approached for replication or expansion by TAM.



**Visit MDRelay.org to learn more about TAM, Maryland Relay, and the MAT program.
For questions or assistance, please email More.Info@Maryland.gov,
and a member of our team will be in contact with you.**

*For the updated grant schedule, please check
Dolt.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/CommAccessGrnt.aspx*

Deaf President Now! at the Sundance Film Festival

As the world's only university designed for students who are Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, and DeafDisabled, Gallaudet University is a pillar in the history of many communities that TAM provides services for. There are over **23,000 Gallaudet alumni and counting, some of whom are Maryland Relay users and members of the TAM team!**

Thanks to a new documentary from Gallaudet alumni and actor, Nyle DiMarco, and Academy Award documentarian, Davis Guggenheim, a **significant part of Gallaudet's history premiered at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival and is currently streaming worldwide on Apple TV+.**

Deaf President Now! (DPN) is about the overwhelming support calling for a Deaf president of Gallaudet that took place in Washington, D.C., on the university's campus. The 1988 protest was a response to the Gallaudet Board of Trustees appointing a hearing individual over two Deaf individuals as the university's next presidential candidate. After seven days of active protesting, Gallaudet's first Deaf president, Irving King Jordan, was appointed. **Although the protest only lasted a week, the impact and importance of DPN is still felt today.**

The documentary was a runner-up for the 2025 Festival Favorite Award and received glowing reviews from critics in attendance. We are excited to experience it for ourselves, as it shares a part of the history of a community we are honored to serve!

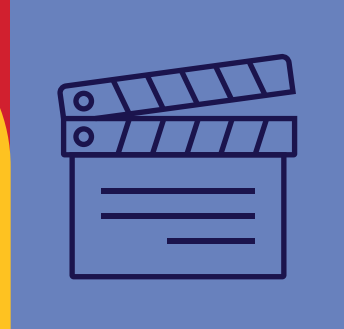
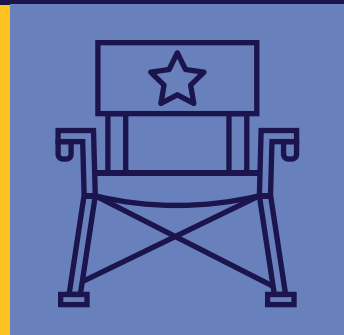
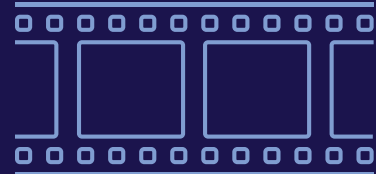


PHOTO COURTESY
OF APPLE TV+



Let's Discuss *Deaf President Now!* on Social Media

All Maryland Relay social media pages give the latest updates for communities we serve as well as service spotlights, equipment explanations, and upcoming outreach events!

Give us a Follow:



Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711



@MDRelay711



@MDRelay711



What Maryland Relay Does Better than a Smartphone

There are some common misconceptions about a smartphone being the superior caption provider for video calls (including conference calls, virtual meetings, or webinars), but a free, state-provided option exists!

Although a smartphone using Automatic Speech Recognition Software (ASR) to provide captioning might seem like the best choice for someone who has difficulty hearing, Relay Conference Captioning (RCC) is more accessible, high quality, and customizable than any other option. Part of what makes RCC a better option than ASR is that RCC is provided by a skilled captioner who listens to the audio portion of a conference call, virtual meeting, or webinar.

While ASR can computer-generate captions based on people’s voices and, in the right scenario, can be a helpful tool, RCC has a higher accuracy percentage because a human captioner can distinguish all the speakers on a call, infer context, and customize the caption font size and text color to meet the specific needs of the user. This free service, offered exclusively from Maryland Relay to approved individuals, is here to provide you with the best captioning for conference calls, virtual meetings, or webinars—and even better than your smartphone.

Here’s how you can get started with RCC:

- To guarantee RCC, an individual must submit the RCC Scheduling Request Form 48 hours in advance of the call, virtual meeting, or webinar.
- Once the RCC Scheduling Request Form is submitted and approved, the RCC user will receive an email with a link to view captions on their computer or mobile device.
- The captioner accesses the audio portion of the call, virtual meeting, or webinar through an audio conference line or other method.
- Once connected, the captioner listens and produces real-time streaming text, which is sent over the Internet. The text shows up just seconds after someone has spoken on the user’s computer, tablet, or smartphone.
- At any time, the RCC user can scroll up to review the text.
- The RCC user has the option to review a raw, unedited transcript from the captioner within one full business day.



Complete the RCC Scheduling Request Form at MarylandRCC.com now!

Maryland Relay Can Help with That!

"As I get older, it's harder to clearly understand what the person calling is saying over the phone."

We can help with that!

For people who have hearing loss but can speak during telephone calls, our Voice Carry-Over (VCO) service is the perfect tool to help them understand exactly what the other party is saying. It works when the VCO user speaks directly to the person being called and, through specialized equipment, reads what is spoken by the other party. It's that simple to improve communication with others over the phone!

For more information about Maryland Relay's VCO service, visit DoIT.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/VCO-Voice-Carry-Over

We can help with that!

Our RCC service is designed for individuals who have difficulty hearing! RCC provides real-time streaming text of what all participants are saying during conference calls, virtual meetings, or webinars. This free service is offered exclusively by Maryland Relay to approved individuals and all that's needed is an Internet-connected device.

For more information about Maryland Relay's RCC service, visit MarylandRCC.com

"I'm hard of hearing and have to attend an important webinar for work, but I'm nervous I'll miss what's being said."

We can help with that!

A Maryland Relay service called Speech-to-Speech (STS) is for those with mild to moderate speaking difficulties. Whether using their own voice, voice synthesizer, or voice enhancer, the STS user communicates with the Maryland Relay Operator who then listens and re-voices it, as needed, to the other person on the call. STS is ideal for, but not limited to, anyone living with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, and Parkinson's disease, or those recovering from a traumatic brain injury, stroke, or laryngectomy.

For more information about Maryland Relay's STS service, visit DoIT.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/STS

"I have trouble speaking because of my cerebral palsy, but I want to have clearer conversations where anyone can understand me."

Explore the many ways that Maryland Relay can help with your unique communication needs—visit MDRelay.org today to learn more!

21st-Century Trailblazers

TAM is happy to spotlight six 21st-century trailblazers who are making waves in the Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing communities. These individuals represent the advocates of today who use their platforms for inclusivity and accessibility across all aspects of life. They lead their generation of peers towards acceptance and new opportunities for members of their respective communities.

COURTESY OF DIPHOPWAWA.COM



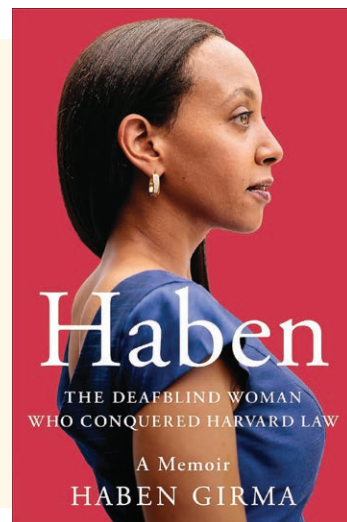
Warren "Wawa" Snipe

Wawa, known for the genre "Dip Hop" (Hip Hop through Deaf eyes), is a recording artist who has shaped the music scene since 2005. His unique sound, blending audio and imagery, makes space for musicians who are Deaf in a hearing-dominated industry. Wawa believes that music can shine a light on the challenges people with disabilities face and shows why they should not be underestimated.

Haben Girma

Haben is many things—an advocate for inclusion, a best-selling author, a keynote speaker, and the first Harvard Law School graduate who is DeafBlind. In addition to her authoring her best-selling book, *Haben: The Deafblind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law*, she was featured in *Forbes* 30 under 30 in 2016 and became one of the first leaders appointed to serve on the World Health Organization's new commission on social connection in 2023. Her experience as a DeafBlind, Black woman shapes her mantra to never misjudge anyone because of how they look.

COURTESY HABENGIRMA.COM



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Elsa Sjunneson

Elsa is a DeafBlind, three-time Hugo Award-winning author and editor of *Being Seen: One Deafblind Woman's Fight to End Ableism*. In her debut memoir, Elsa dives deep into how the misrepresentation of disability in books, movies, and TV harms both the disabled community and everyone else.



Keivonn Woodard

Hailing from Maryland and at just 12 years old, Keivonn has won multiple awards—including Best Breakthrough Performance in a Scripted Series at the 2024 Film Independent Spirit Awards—for his performance on HBO's *The Last of Us*. He's also the first Black Deaf actor in the Television Academy's history to secure a nomination. Even in 2025, stories written for the Deaf community and played by actors who are Deaf are in the minority—but that doesn't mean we should stop fighting for change.

Justina Miles

After going viral in 2023 for her stellar interpreting for Rihanna's Super Bowl halftime show, Justina has used her platform to advocate for the importance of American Sign Language in cognitive development and social inclusion for great acceptance and integration of Deaf culture.



Nancy Rourke

Nancy Rourke has been an artist her whole life, and her numerous awards, commissions, exhibitions, and honors are a testament to the Deaf experience. Her art is an act of resistance, affirmation, and liberation for Deaf individuals all over the world.

Learn about more uplifting advocates who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing and who push for inclusivity and recognition by following us on social media!



Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711



@MDRelay711



@MDRelay711

Share Your Expertise at Our Communication Accessibility Summit

We are excited to announce the call for proposals for our upcoming Communication Accessibility Summit in honor of Deaf Awareness Month!

This summit is a collaboration with the Maryland Governor's Office for the Deaf and hard of hearing, TAM, and the Deaf Culture Digital Library. It aims to bring together the Deaf community, advocates, professionals, and allies to explore vital topics in communication access, highlight innovative strategies and research, share personal experiences, and foster meaningful discussions.

Proposed topics of interest include (but are not limited to):

- Modern and emerging technologies
- ASL interpreting
- Captioning technologies
- Direct video communication services
- Accessibility features in digital devices
- Communication rights for incarcerated individuals
- Best practices in digital communication accessibility

Presentation format options:

- Panel discussions
- Lectures or lightning talks
- Interactive workshops

Proposal submissions must include:

- Session format (panel, lightning talk, or workshop)
- Length of session (30, 45, or 60 minutes maximum)
- Presentation title
- Abstract (maximum 200 words)
- Speaker bio and photo
- Target audience, learning objectives, or key takeaways
- Accessibility needs (ASL interpreters, CART services, or others)

Accessibility services, including ASL Interpreters and CART services, will be provided at the event.

Communication Accessibility Summit

September 19 & 20
Maryland School for the Deaf
8169 Old Montgomery Road
Ellicott City, MD 21043

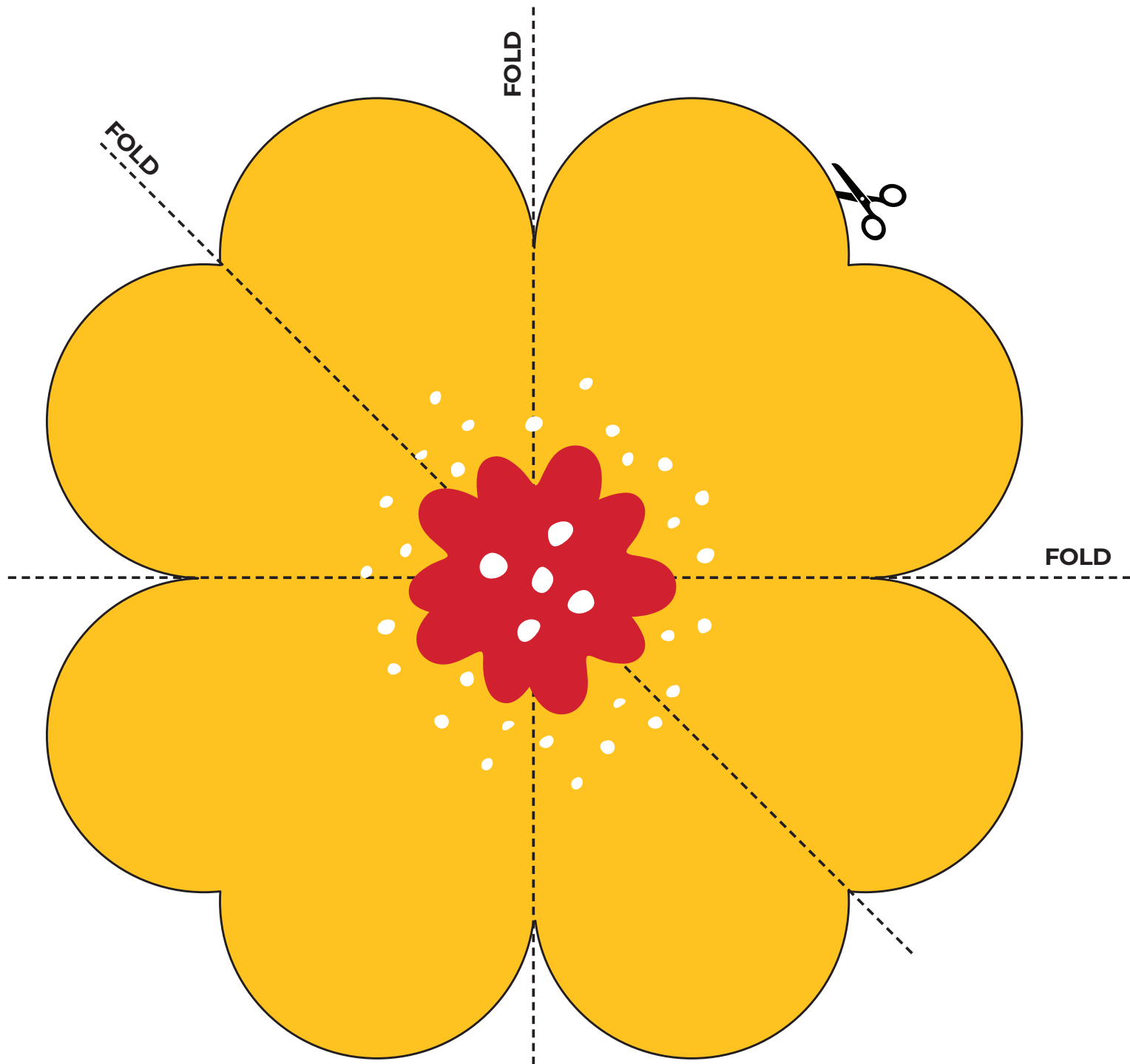


Please email your proposal submission to MDDeafAwareness@gmail.com

Make Your Own TAM Flower

Summer is here, and we're excited to soak up the sun, enjoy the warm weather, and provide people with the best telecommunication services and equipment. Join in on the summer excitement by creating your very own TAM flower!

Simply tear off the page below, follow the dotted folding guidelines, and cut along the solid line. When you open the page, you'll have made an everlasting, beautiful flower that always reminds you of your friends at TAM!



The MAT Process is Changing

A new application is on its way!

The Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program application process is undergoing reconstruction to help applicants have more freedom to choose the best equipment that fits their needs.

While the new system is under development, **TAM will continue to accept current MAT applications until further notice.** Make sure you follow us on social media and sign up for our newsletter to receive information about the updated MAT program!



How the MAT Program Works

In the meantime, follow the steps below!

1. Apply for equipment provided by the State

Applicants can apply online at MAT-Apply.org, download and print out the application and submit it online, request an application by mail, or email the application to MAT.Program1@Maryland.gov. If you apply and do not qualify, you may purchase equipment directly from a third-party provider. Individuals who purchase equipment may still receive a free evaluation.



2. Complete the Disability Certification Form

(Integrated into online application - No copying/mailing required)

As part of the application process, applicants must provide the required information requested on the Disability Certification form. Once you have completed your required part, give this form to your doctor, audiologist, rehabilitation counselor, speech pathologist, social worker, psychologist, mental health counselor, registered nurse, license practical nurse, or physical therapist to complete and return directly to MAT.

3. Make a copy of eligibility documents and your entire application

(Integrated into online application - No copying/mailing required)

Make a copy of your required eligibility documents (do not send the original documents; they will not be returned). The copied eligibility forms can be folded and taped inside of your completed application and sent directly to MAT showing the pre-paid, addressed panel on the outside, or uploaded and submitted directly online. Applicants are encouraged to make a copy of their entire application for personal reference.



4. Schedule a free personalized evaluation

After your application is reviewed, you will be contacted to schedule a free evaluation either virtually or at one of our statewide MAT evaluation centers.

5. Get a solution that's right for you

During your evaluation, you will work one-on-one with a MAT program specialist to try out different equipment options and identify the one that works for you.

6. Start using your new equipment!

Equipment is shipped to you within 4-6 weeks. Each device comes with personalized instructions for setup and use. You may also contact your MAT evaluator for additional training.

If you have any questions about the current or future MAT program process, please contact Kevin Steffy, MAT Manager, at 443-852-6717 (SMS) or 410-246-4481 (Office) or email Kevin.Steffy@Maryland.gov.

To learn more, visit MDMAT.org

Resources for Maryland's Former Federal Employees

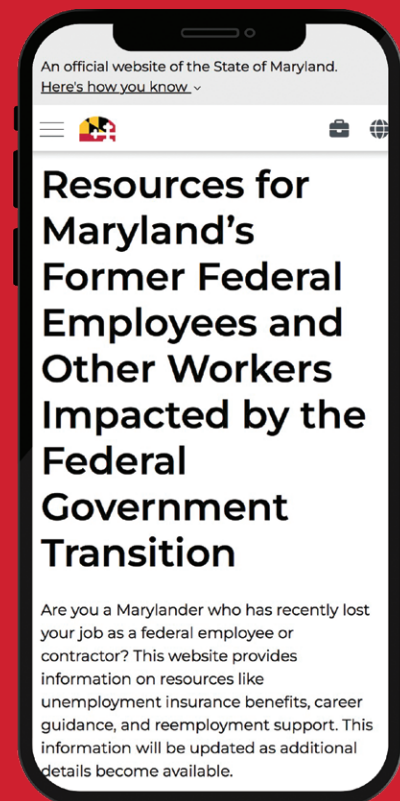
A new website for workers impacted by the federal government transition is live.

Scroll down for links to:

career guidance

reemployment support

unemployment insurance benefits



Are you a Marylander who has recently lost your job as a federal employee or contractor? A new website from the Maryland government is here to provide information on resources like unemployment insurance benefits, career guidance, and reemployment support. This information will be updated as additional details become available.

Visit Labor.Maryland.gov/FederalWorkers for more information.



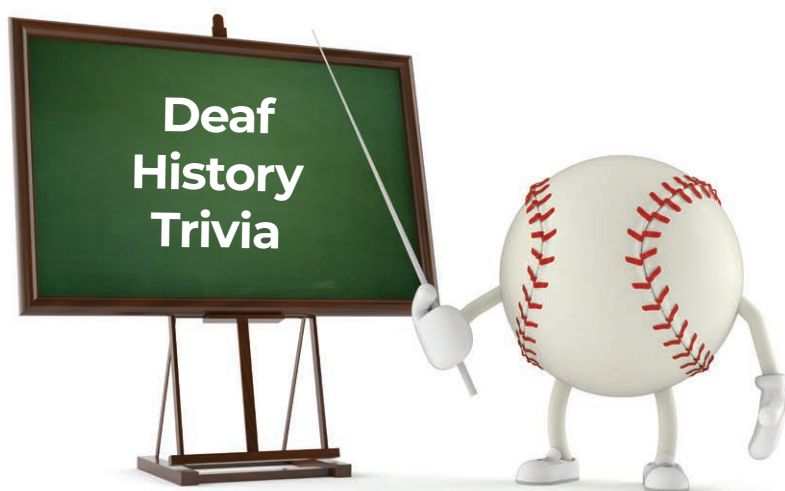
Telecommunications Access of Maryland

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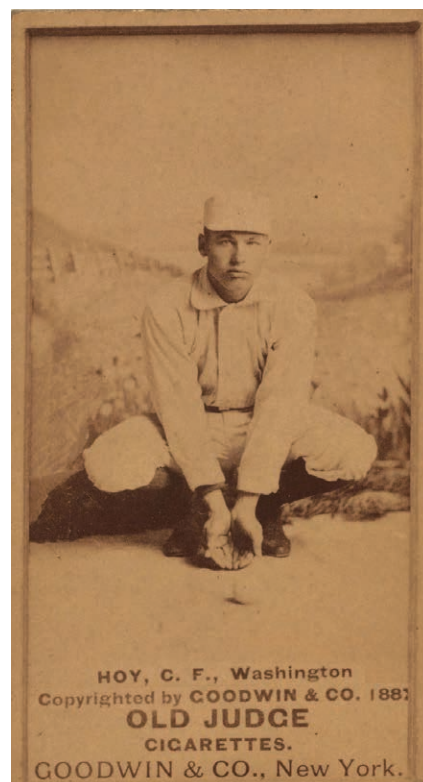
 X.com/MDRelay711

 Instagram.com/MDRelay711



Did you know? William Hoy was the first Major League Baseball player who was Deaf. He hit the first grand-slam home run in the American League and created the hand signals that are still used in baseball today!

Looking for your daily dose of trivia, Maryland Relay service spotlights, and upcoming events in your community? Check out our social media pages!



 Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711

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