



MONTHLY BULLETIN

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 2009

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: SB97

An important bill is being considered by Maryland lawmakers this legislative session: Senate Bill 97, "Election Law—Campaign Advertisements—Closed Captioning." Since 1995, Federal Campaign Finance Law has mandated that presidential candidates who receive public funds must caption their ads. Currently, Maryland state law does not require candidates running for public office to make their television or on-line video campaign advertisements accessible for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Senator Stone (D-Baltimore County) wants to change that, which is why he sponsored SB 97.



The bill will require that all candidates caption their ads on the Web and on TV and that they put transcripts of their radio ads on their websites unless they file a letter that explains why they are not captioning or providing transcripts with the State Board before the ad is broadcast or posted. You can

read the text of the bill at <http://mlis.state.md.us/2009rs/bills/sb/sb0097f.pdf>.

It is important that deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind citizens communicate with their elected officials about the importance of this bill. Your legislators are there to represent you and your interests, so let them know what you think! You can testify in support of the bill or send them a letter or email letting them know of your support.

A hearing for SB97 will be held on Thursday, January 29, 2009 at 2 PM at 2 West Miller Senate Building, 11 Bladen Street, Annapolis, MD. If you want to testify, you must sign in by 12:40 p.m. An interpreter will be present.

If you cannot attend the hearing and would like to send a letter or email to your legislator, you can find their contact information by visiting <http://mdelect.net/>.

ODHH BUDGET HEARINGS

Each year, State agencies are asked to draft and submit a budget for approval from the General Assembly. As part of this process, both Houses of the legislature hold hearings to solicit testimony and decide whether the budget should be approved or whether there should be cuts.



The ODHH Budget Hearings are coming up! The hearing in the House of Delegates will be held on Wednesday, February 11 at 1 PM and the Senate Budget Hearing will be held

on Friday, February 13 at 1 PM. The budget is a crucial part of ensuring that individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind receive full access to services. It is important that Senators and Delegates hear from you about the work ODHH does and how the Office benefits deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind Marylanders. Please consider attending a hearing or contacting your representative to support the approval of the ODHH budget without cuts.

ODHH

PROGRAMS

- *Awareness Training and Technical Assistance*
- *Constituent Services*
- *Community Outreach and Education*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

ODHH UPDATES	2
FREE TELEPHONE EQUIPMENT FROM MAT	2
EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES PROGRAM (EID)	3
STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS	4
ANNOUNCEMENTS	4

ODHH UPDATES AND DIRECTOR'S CORNER

ODHH hit the ground running in 2009 and if January is any indication, it is going to be a busy and productive year for our small office. In addition to fielding requests for information and referral from our constituents, ODHH has been busy reviewing bills that may effect deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind Marylanders since the start of legislative session on January 14.

We have continued our training and outreach efforts, which started close to home by presenting an introduction to the ODHH mission and programs to the MD Department of Disabilities. As a result, we established linkage with the EID program (see page 3) and received a request to develop video/trainings as a result. The Office also began coordination with MEMA to develop video in American Sign

Language to be posted on state websites with information for Marylanders who are deaf and hard of hearing .



In order to ensure access to the legislative process, the Office Coordinated ASL Interpreters for hearing for SB97 (see cover) and for the ODHH budget hearings (see cover). I hope that all of you will take the time to contact your representatives regarding SB 97 and the ODHH budget hearings. It is so important that our community is visible and involved.

I look forward to seeing and working with you in the New Year! *Lisa*

FREE TELEPHONE EQUIPMENT FROM MARYLAND ACCESSIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS

For many people, using the telephone is a luxury that they take for granted. However, for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, communicating by phone can be a daunting or seemingly impossible task. Missing words or mistaking meaning can lead to some avoiding the telephone altogether. Fortunately, current technology offers solutions for those who cannot use a standard phone.

Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT), together with Maryland Relay, has been providing free assistive telephone equipment in Maryland for more than a decade. Devices such as amplified phones, captioned telephones, ring signalers, and TTY machines are available at no cost to qualified Maryland residents. The MAT program serves customers who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, or have a cognitive, mobility, or speech disability. Assistive telephones can greatly increase independence, reduce frustration, and help Deaf and Hard of Hearing people stay connected with family and friends.

The MAT program provides free telephone assessments. Because everyone's hearing loss is different, a variety of specialized telephones are available to meet a range of communication needs. Six evaluation centers are located in Maryland so customers (or those interested in buying their own equipment) can come to trial phones and learn which is the most appropriate. After customers receive their telephone, MAT can also provide free training and installation.

To be considered for the MAT equipment distribution program, applicants must:

- Be a Maryland resident
- Be at least 5 years old
- Be a recipient of SSI (Supplemental Security Income), SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance), TDAP (Temporary Disability Assistance Program), TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), VA (Veterans), SSA (Social Security) benefits or Pharmacy, Medical, Housing Assistance, or be able to prove a Financial Hardship.
- Be certified as having one of the following disabilities: mobility, blind, low vision, cognitive, DeafBlind, speech, deaf or hard of hearing, and have difficulty using a standard telephone.
- Have telephone service in the home or apply for phone service



For an application and more information about the MAT program, please contact:

Maryland Accessible Telecommunications/ Maryland Relay
301 W. Preston Street, Suite 1008A
Baltimore, MD 21201
Phone: 800-552-7724 (V//TTY//VP)
Email: moreinfo@mdrelay.org
Website: www.mdrelay.org (download a MAT Application under 'Free Equipment' link)

EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES PROGRAM (EID)

For Vicki Mills, Edward Johnson, and Kim and Dianne VanderWeyden, enrollment in the Employed Individuals with Disabilities (EID) program allowed these Marylanders to earn more money, save on medical costs and in one case, purchase a home.

Envisioned as a work incentive, the Maryland EID program enables individuals with disabilities who work and meet certain other requirements to receive Medicaid coverage for a minimal fee. The EID Medical Assistance program provides comprehensive health benefits, including some services (such as attendant care) that many people with disabilities need, but other health insurance plans rarely cover. The income and asset limits under the EID Program also are much higher than for other Medicaid programs.

For Vicki Mills who was enrolled in the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary plan, changing to the EID program allowed her to increase her monthly earnings from only \$60 per month to hundreds per month, with the potential of earning significantly more without losing her healthcare benefits.

The EID Medical Assistance program also can save people with Medicare at least \$1,000 a year in medical expenses and can supplement private insurance and Medicare, covering some services that other insurance does not cover.

Edward Johnson was “spending down” to qualify for Medical Assistance – a method that requires an applicant to spend typically thousands of dollars every six months on medical expenses in order to qualify for Medical Assistance. With only two weeks until his coverage expired and looking at an additional \$8,000 in out-of-pocket medical expenses to qualify for another six months of coverage, Edward discovered the EID program. Under the EID program, Edward could pay a nominal fee of \$75 for six month’s coverage if he was employed and receiving a salary. Within three hours of learning about the program and its eligibility requirements, Edward, who was employed, had applied for the EID.

Kim and Dianne VanderWeyden had been renting a small, inexpensive apartment for many years, but dreamed of buying their own home. They had investigated the Maryland Homeownership for Individuals with Disabilities Program but found that even at the very low interest rate the program offered, the mortgage payment would be substantially more than their current rent, an increase they could not afford. Attending an EID workshop offered by the Maryland Department of Disabilities, they learned that Kim was eligible for the program. Their savings on Medicare costs, over \$1,000 a month, enabled the VanderWeydens to qualify for the mortgage and in June 2008 they moved into their new home.

On October 1, 2008, new regulations for the Employed Individuals with Disabilities (EID) Program went into effect; regulations that will enable EID applicants to save more in certain retirement accounts; qualify applicants for EID in some cases if they have not been approved for SSDI or SSI benefits; and set a new premium structure.

Under the new regulations individuals with retirement funds in 401 (K), 403 (B), pension and Keogh plans are eligible for the EID program, regardless of the amounts they have in these plans. Under the old regulations, only the first \$4,000 in these retirement accounts was excluded. Other types of retirement accounts (e.g., IRA’s) are still fully countable, so the full amounts in those accounts apply to the \$10,000 resource limit for EID.

Individuals who have not already had a disability determination from Social Security may now apply for EID. To qualify, they must still meet Social Security’s medical criteria for disability, but may be ineligible for SSDI and/or SSI for financial reasons (e.g., earnings over substantial gainful activity (SGA), lacking “insured status”, too much income or resources). Most applicants will still need to apply for SSDI, but if denied for financial reasons, they will receive a separate disability determination for EID. Applicants whose gross earnings are \$1,900/month or more (if not blind) or \$2,600/month or more (if blind) will not need to apply for SSDI, and will be referred directly for an EID disability determination. This change benefits individuals who do not qualify for SSDI or SSI for financial reasons; they can qualify for EID now, but could not under the old EID regulations.

Premiums have changed from the old flat fee of \$75 for six months of coverage, to a four-tiered system ranging from \$0 to \$55 per month, based on countable income level. An estimated 85 – 90 percent of all people who enroll will pay the lowest two premiums, \$0 - \$25 per month. Individuals will also no longer need to submit payment with their applications. An applicant pays nothing unless his/her application is approved. If and when the application is approved, the applicant receives a notice of the premium amount due, and can then either pay it or request a hardship waiver.

To receive more information about the EID program, or to apply, please contact the EID Outreach Project at 443-514-5034 (voice); 1-800-637-4113 (toll-free – voice/TTY); via email at eid@mdod.state.md.us; or visit the MDOD Website and learn more about the Employed Individuals with Disabilities (EID) Program.

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

217 East Redwood Street, Suite 1300
Baltimore, MD 21202

Voice: 410-767-1497
TTY: 410-767-7756
VP: 443-453-5954
Fax: 410-333-1016

Martin O'Malley
Governor

Anthony G. Brown
Lieutenant Governor

Lisa H. Kornberg
Director

Julie Anne Schafer
Editor

WWW.ODHH.MD.GOV

ODHH ON THE MOVE

February 2009

ODHH House Budget Hearing
Wednesday, February 11, 1 PM
House of Delegates Building, Room 142
Annapolis, MD

ODHH Senate Budget Hearing
Friday, February 13, 1 PM
Miller Senate Building, 3 West
Annapolis, MD

ODHH Mental Health Subcommittee Meeting
Tuesday, February 17, 1 PM—3 PM
Mental Hygiene Administration
Jessup, MD

Brown Bag Lunch for Professionals
Thursday, February 26, 11:30 AM
CIRS
Baltimore, MD

Please note that ODHH will be closed on Monday, February 16, 2009 in observance of President's Day.



March 2009

ODHH Advisory Council Meeting
Tuesday, March 3, 7 PM—PM
Location to be announced



Like any other population, people with hearing loss travel. And, also like any other population, travelling can be an experience of relaxation and enjoyment or one of anxiety and stress. However, an added stressor to deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind travelers is that of access to communication.

Lack of visual displays; lack of interpreters; lack of working captioning on in-flight movies, airline officials' insensitivity to the needs of travelers with hearing loss - all of these factors can create unnecessary headache for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind.

The Department of Transportation (USDOT) says that individuals with hearing loss do not complain about their travel issues! And when individuals with hearing loss do not complain, the USDOT is unaware of issues and cannot take action to resolve them. So if you have a bad travel experience, speak up! You can find and print the complaint form at <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/forms/382form.pdf>

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Each January, the Governor of Maryland delivers a "State of the State Address" to inform lawmakers and citizens alike of legislative proposals, accomplishments and successes earned, and challenges facing the state in the months ahead. Last year, Governor O'Malley focused on the need to protect Maryland's critical priorities - to strengthen and protect our middle class, to protect our commitment to improve public safety and public education in every region of our State, and to protect opportunity for the hard-working families of our State.



This year, Governor O'Malley will deliver his third annual State of the State Address on Thursday, January 29, 2009 at noon in Annapolis. There will be an ASL interpreter present.

Consider going to the Capitol for this important event, however, if you are unable to make it, the speech will be posted online. Last year was the first year that Governor's speech was posted online with ASL interpretation and a transcript. We are working with the Governor's Office to ensure that this year's address is accessible to all concerned citizens of Maryland.