

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary  
Christian J. Miele, Deputy Secretary

Larry Hogan, Governor  
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**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES  
AGENCY RESPONSE  
FISCAL YEAR 2021 OPERATING BUDGET HEARINGS**

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE  
SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE  
Senator Melony Griffith, Chair  
January 31, 2020**

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
Delegate Kirill Reznik, Chair  
Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith, Vice Chair  
February 12, 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today as you review the proposed budget for the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) for FY 2021. We would like to thank our assigned DLS analyst, Ms. Grace Pedersen, for her thorough analysis and are pleased with the recommendation to concur with the Governor's allowance.

**Recommended Actions**

**1. Concur with the Governor's Allowance.**

We respectfully support this recommended action.

**2. In the 2019 session, committee narrative in the Joint Chairmen’s Report (JCR) requested a report on the status of nonvisual accessibility of State agency websites and documents. As the initiative was still in its infancy at the time of MDOD’s submission, the response did not include requested information such as an assessment of current nonvisual accessibility, national best practices, recommendations that would be appropriate for Maryland, and cost estimates for recommendations. The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) again recommends a report on actions taken by MDOD to improve accessibility of State websites and documents.**

The analyst correctly notes that MDOD’s November 19, 2019, response to the JCR did not include specifics related to the information they requested because we were in the very early stages of implementing a strategy to evaluate the level of nonvisual accessibility of State agency websites and documents. Our response did commit to providing these details within six months of our submission. MDOD will submit the recommended report by May 19, 2020, which will also include a detailed statewide IT Accessibility Initiative implementation plan.

The following is a summary of steps we have taken since our November submission as it relates to the specific items requested in the JCR:

**An assessment of the current nonvisual accessibility of websites**

- 1) *New Positions*: The IT Accessibility Coordinator position was filled in November 2019 and we have an active recruitment in place for the IT Accessibility Evaluator position which we expect to conclude in early March. These positions are responsible for conducting regular accessibility reviews of State agency websites, training State agency staff on nonvisual accessibility and providing technical assistance to State agencies. Accessibility Interns from the University of Maryland Baltimore County will start this spring assisting MDOD accessibility staff evaluate State agency sites.
- 2) *Testing*: MDOD is collaborating with the Department of Information and Technology (DoIT) to assess State agency sites against Section 508 standards. In addition, MDOD recently implemented a tool that allows us to evaluate sites against higher accessibility standards recommended in the field but not required under law. The combined results of these assessments will establish the State’s level of compliance with Section 508 and those standards categorized as best practices.
- 3) *Direct Support*: The IT Accessibility Coordinator co-locates at DoIT on a bi-weekly basis and collaborates with their Director of Web Services regarding website accessibility and digital content accessibility for DoIT managed sites. In the past two months, MDOD has responded to direct requests for technical assistance from eight State agencies.

## **National best practices and innovative techniques to achieve better access**

1) *National Federation of the Blind (NFB)*: The IT Accessibility Coordinator is working with the NFB to identify best practices around the evaluation of website accessibility through participation in the NFB's Non Visual Access Community of Practice. A site visit has been scheduled in the spring for MDOD staff to gain hands-on knowledge of various practices to overcome IT accessibility issues for people who are blind or low-vision.

2) *Training*: MDOD has created a comprehensive training schedule of monthly webinars on accessibility dealing with topics such as Website Accessibility 101, Document Accessibility 101 and Accessibility and IT Procurement. These trainings will be offered to State agency staff beginning in February and in coordination with the Department of General Services and DoIT.

3) *IT Accessibility Initiative Webpage*: A webpage for the initiative will launch in mid to late February that will serve as a resource on how to achieve website accessibility, document accessibility, and includes a method for requesting training and/or consultative support from MDOD.

## **Recommendations to improve accessibility that would be appropriate for State agencies in Maryland**

1) *Revising and developing State information policies, procedures and standards*: MDOD is providing technical assistance to DoIT as they complete the revision and adoption of the State's information technology policies, procedures and standards. This is scheduled for completion in late February. The guideline document referenced below in discussion item No. 2 will be based upon the newly adopted policies, procedures and standards.

**3. DLS recommends MDOD, in consultation with the Department of General Services (DGS) and DoIT, develop a guideline document by November 15, 2020, which can be distributed to all State agencies to be used when creating Requests for Proposals that are compliant with IT accessibility standards.**

DoIT is currently in the process of revising and adopting an updated version of the State's information technology policies, procedures, and standards as required by Senate Bill 286 – State Procurement – Information Technology – Nonvisual Access that passed during the 2018 session of the Maryland General Assembly. As previously mentioned, MDOD is providing technical assistance for this project which is scheduled to be completed in late February. MDOD will use the newly adopted IT standards and procedures to develop the requested guideline document in consultation with DGS and DoIT by November 15, 2020.