



HB 264 – Places of Accommodation – Motion Picture Houses – Captioning
House Economic Matters Committee
February 8, 2023
Position: Unfavorable

Dear Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chair Crosby, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in opposition to HB 264 - Motion Picture Houses - Captioning.

My name is Thomas Wienholt, and I am the Vice President of Horizon Cinemas. We are a small family-owned movie theatre company with 5 locations in MD. Each of our locations has 8 or less screens. Since we have limited screens at each location, I am concerned this bill will financially hurt our company. We are still recovering from the pandemic after forced closures in 2020 and 2021. Attendance in 2022 was about 40% below pre-pandemic levels. Forcing us to program multiple open caption shows will create another challenge to overcome in our efforts to stay in business.

Here is what we are currently doing to accommodate the needs of our deaf and hard of hearing customers. As required by law, we provide headsets and/or closed caption devices (which mount on the seats) upon request. In addition, we allow customers to request on-screen open captions via our website: <https://horizoncinemas.com/about--contact>

On average, we only receive one on-screen open caption request per week, per location. We promptly respond to these requests, program the open caption show as close to the requested time as possible, and update the website so that the showtime is labeled "w/Open Captions." Typically, ticket sales for these shows are very low since most of our customers do not want/need the captions. In fact, we have received negative feedback and demands for refunds from customers who were unhappy the screening was open-captioned, even though it was clearly labeled that way on the website and theatre signage.

Our current system has worked well for our customers. In fact, we were recognized by Anne Arundel County a few years ago for our efforts to provide on-screen open captions to our customers.

As written, the bill would require at least two open captioned shows per film each week, after the first week. This one-size-fits-all mandate would not take into consideration the availability of our customers to attend these shows, so we would still have to offer open captions on demand.

Please continue to give us the flexibility to respond to our guest requests and market demands, rather than a one-size-fits-all legislated mandate that will impede our recovery from the pandemic.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Thomas Wienholt, VP