



TESTIMONY SUPPORTING HB264

Places of Public Accommodation - Motion Picture Houses – Captioning

Testimony of Maryland Centers for Independent Living

House Economic Matters Committee; Hearing on February 8, 2023

The seven Centers for Independent Living (CIL) were established by federal law and work to ensure the civil rights and quality services of people with disabilities in Maryland. Centers for Independent Living are nonprofit disability resource and advocacy organizations located throughout Maryland operated by and for people with disabilities. CIL staff and Boards are at least 51% people with disabilities. We are part of a nationwide network which provides Information and Referral, Advocacy, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills training, and Transition Services.

As an employee of the Centers for Independent Living and advocate for people with a disability, I was pleased to see House Bill 264. I have Deaf friends and colleagues and am a person who benefits from captioning for other reasons. Were it not for closed captioning, one of my closest friends would not attend movies because, despite their use of a hearing aid, they also have a disability that impacts how they process information. This bill can support people with disabilities and bring people back to the movies, including many people who might not typically visit a movie theatre. I believe the cost of close captioning will be offset by the increased attendance of those who cannot now attend including those who are hearing impaired or have certain processing disorders.

This bill requires that a place of public accommodation that controls, operates, owns, or leases at least two motion picture houses in Maryland provide open captioning for at least two screenings each week. This action supports good business practice and promotes universal design. It removes the burden from the individual who would typically have to request a small handheld captioning device in advance of attending a movie screening. I have heard stories of theatres not having these captioning devices on sight, or that the devices available were not functioning properly. My friend shares with me that asking for this device is yet one more nuisance that deters them from going to see a movie. Thus, they are missing out on an opportunity to socialize and build community. For most people without disabilities going to the movies is a fun activity of convenience, and people with disabilities deserve an equitable community living experience whereby they can participate in all sectors of society – including

recreation and leisure. If a customer does not want to view a movie with open captions, they can choose to attend a different screening.

This bill can help theatres recover from business losses during the pandemic, and likewise create a more welcoming environment for people with disabilities. Please give HB264 a favorable vote so it can move forward.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erin Ashinghurst". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Erin" and last name "Ashinghurst" clearly legible.

Erin Ashinghurst, MS
Deputy Director of Supports and Services
Accessible Resources for Independence

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