



**Statement of Position
National Association of Theatre Owners**

In Opposition to HB 264: Motion Picture Houses – Captioning

House Economic Matters Committee, Maryland State Assembly

February 8, 2023

On behalf of the membership of the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO) operating in Maryland, we respectfully submit these written comments in opposition to HB 264 - Motion Picture Houses – Captioning.

The exhibition industry is committed to providing access for all patrons attending a motion picture. To achieve this goal, NATO has worked with the federal government, exhibitors, advocacy groups, film studios, and technology developers to provide personal closed captioning devices that ensure equal access for every movie at every showtime.

Furthermore, to increase access options for moviegoers, theatres throughout the country, including many operating in Maryland, are committed to providing open captioned showtimes based on consumer desire, market conditions, and guest feedback. These programs have been operating despite the ongoing existential threats to the industry caused by the prolonged recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and limited film supply. A mandate such as HB 264 would further inhibit the industry's recovery in Maryland.

Data collected by exhibitors shows that open captioned showtimes attract fewer guests than non-captioned shows. HB 264 would not allow exhibitors the flexibility necessary to respond to the needs of the communities in which they operate. Instead, we ask that the exhibitors be allowed to continue developing models for open captioned programming that fit the needs of their customer base while allowing theatres the ability to react to the ever-changing desires of their audiences.

A “one-size-fits-all” approach does not reflect the individualized operations of each theater nor the customers they serve. An open captioned mandate would not allow theatres to build a framework in which operators and advocates can work together to create market-driven programs that can be adjusted and improved where needed. Through this joint process, movie theaters aim to implement open captioned programs that meet or exceed the demands of the local market.

For these reasons, NATO respectfully opposes HB 264: Motion Picture Houses – Captioning. The exhibition industry remains committed to maintaining access for all patrons attending movies and expanding options for their customers based on consumer demand.