



## MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

Lowe House Office Building, 6 Bladen Street, Room 200 · Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
Phone 410-841-3374 | 301-858-3374 · 800-492-7122 Ext. 3374 · Fax 410-841-3342 | 301-858-3342  
latino.caucus@house.state.md.us · www.mdlatinocaucus.org

DAVID FRASER-HIDALGO, CHAIR  
JOSELINE A. PEÑA-MELNYK, VICE-CHAIR  
GABRIEL ACEVERO, TREASURER  
JESSE T. PIPPY, SECRETARY  
JASON A. AVILA GARCIA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TO: Ben Barnes, Chair  
Mark S. Chang, Vice Chair  
Appropriations Committee Members  
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus  
DATE: 1/31/24  
RE: HB0098 Co-Navigation Bill for the Deaf/Blind Community

### **The MLLC supports HB98 Co-Navigation Bill for the Deaf/Blind Community, 2024**

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB98.

Blind and deaf individuals encounter barriers that impede their ability to move freely and safely in our society. Traditional navigation tools, such as visual cues and audible signals, are often insufficient for those who face dual sensory impairments. As a result, many members of the blind and deaf community are dependent on external assistance, limiting their autonomy and hindering their full participation in various aspects of daily life. There are 32,000 residents in the State of Maryland who are both deaf and blind, and nearly 1 in 7 Latinos have some form of hearing loss.<sup>1</sup> Co-navigation services via trained guides can assist individuals with both visual and auditory impairments. These services provide personalized support, offering real-time assistance in navigating public spaces, using public transportation, and engaging in various community activities. Co-navigation services not only promote the well-being of blind and deaf individuals but contribute to the overall economic and social advancement of our state by fostering independence and inclusivity.

HB98 establishes a Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program within the Maryland Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The program provides free co-navigation services to deafblind residents across the state to improve their communication accessibility and access to surroundings. Services are delivered by trained co-navigators. To ensure quality, the Office must secure funding sources, monitor co-navigators, provide training and create an advisory committee of deafblind individuals and stakeholders.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB98.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Cruickshanks, Karen J., et al. "Hearing Impairment Prevalence and Associated Risk Factors in the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos." \*JAMA Otolaryngology-- Head & Neck Surgery\*, vol. 141, no. 7, July 2015, p. 641](#)