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**Written Testimony**

**House Bill 98 - Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Deafblind  
Co-Navigation Services Program - Established  
Appropriations Committee – January 30, 2024  
Support**

**Background: House Bill 98** would establish Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program in the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide co-navigation services at no cost to deafblind individuals in the State. Additionally, it will statutorily define "co-navigation services," which are services that provide visual and environmental information or sighted services to assist with accessibility.

**Written Comments:** The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. This includes the Jewish Connection Network, which has an entire department dedicated to ensuring that every member of our community, regardless of their background or abilities, can fully embrace Jewish life. Whether they need guidance, assistance, or simply a sense of belonging, JCN is available to help individuals and families facing various challenges.

The U.S. hard-of-hearing population parallels the U.S. Jewish population. And while there are no resources to correlate deaf statistics to the Jewish population, there is no reason to assume the percentage of deaf Jews is other than that of the general population. It can be estimated that 0.22 percent of U.S. Jews, more than 14,000 people, are deaf; 2.2 percent of U.S. Jews, nearly 142,000 people, have a lot of trouble hearing; and 2.05 percent of Jews worldwide, some 271,256 people, have disabling hearing impairment. Additionally, blindness due to Usher Syndrome is more common among people of Ashkenazi (eastern and central European) Jewish or French Acadian heritage than in the general population.

By supporting this legislation, you are easing the access of resources for the Deafblind community. **For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for a favorable report on HB98.**

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.*