



**DATE:** January 30, 2024      **COMMITTEE:** House Appropriations  
**BILL NO:** House Bill 98  
**BILL TITLE:** Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Prgm – Est.  
**POSITION:** Support

**Kennedy Krieger Institute supports House Bill 98 - Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program – Established.**

**Bill Summary:**

House Bill 98 establishes the Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program within the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This new program will provide co-navigation services to deafblind individuals by providing visual, environmental or sighted services to assist with communication accessibility.

**Background:**

Kennedy Krieger Institute provides specialized services to patients nationally and internationally. Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger’s services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

The Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) at Kennedy Krieger Institute is proud to be Maryland’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (UCEDD) and a member of the national Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD).

MCDD links the community to vital services, research, and information to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Our mission is to provide leadership that advances the inclusion of people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities through preservice preparation and training; research and evaluation; community service and technical assistance; and information dissemination.

**Rationale:**

A deafblind individual is an individual that experiences some level of deafness and blindness. There are approximately 40,000 deafblind individuals in the US with 10,000 being children.<sup>1</sup> Inclusion and implementation of deafblind navigation services can increase safety and accessibility for deafblind individuals. Children and individuals in the deaf and hard of hearing community have higher rates of acquiring injuries due to their reduced ability to recognize or hear hazardous situations.<sup>2</sup> Communication breakdowns can occur with deafblind individuals in public settings (e.g., public transportation) particularly when crucial transportation information is not accessible to individuals with sensory impairments. Co-navigation services such as visual displays and mobile applications provided by public transit networks can help provide resources to deafblind individuals to improve safety and accessibility.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, deafblind individuals may require the use of co-navigation services to access basic amenities like food from the grocery store or prescriptions from the pharmacy. Without co-navigation services deafblind individuals may either be dependent on a family or community member to complete those errands or unsafely navigate their community by themselves. Co-navigation services can increase independence of deafblind individuals while providing deafblind individuals the support they need to safely navigate their environment.

**Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on House Bill 98.**

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<sup>1</sup> National Center of Deafblindness, *About the National Center on Deafblindness* (accessed Jan. 24, 2024), <https://www.nationaldb.org/about/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mann et al, *Children with Hearing Loss and Increased Risk of Injury*, *Annals of Family Medicine* (Nov. 2007), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2094020/>, doi: 10.1360/afm.740.

<sup>3</sup> Omoso, *The Importance of Accessible Public Transportation: How Technology is Improving Mobility for Deaf People*, *Unspoken ASL* (Feb, 2023), <https://www.unspokenasl.com/aslblogs/the-importance-of-accessible-public-transportation-how-technology-is-improving-mobility-for-deaf-people/>.