



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB0098

January 30, 2024

TO: Members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program - Established

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 98.

HB 98 establishes a Deafblind co–navigation services program within the State Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Individuals who are deafblind have combined hearing and vision loss, limiting their access to auditory and visual information.ⁱ The co-navigation program established by HB 98 will help these persons in accessing and making decisions about their physical environment.

Deafblindness can be caused by an illness (such as meningitis), brain injury, or inherited genetic conditions.ⁱ Individuals with deafblindness and their families need additional support to navigate the world around them. There are an estimated 14,227 Baltimore City residents with a hearing difficulty and 17,946 Baltimore City residents with a vision difficulty.ⁱⁱ Baltimore City supports persons with disabilities through a wide range of services and programs, including information and assistance programs, offered by the Health Department's Maryland Access Point program. Specialized support services, however, are needed for specific populations with specific needs. The Deafblind co-navigation program is an important addition to the array of services the State of Maryland offers, providing a resource that the City Health Department can draw upon in assisting City residents who are deafblind.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 98.

ⁱ National Center of Deafblindness. (2024). Deafblindness Overview. Retrieved from <https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/deaf-blindness-overview/>

ⁱⁱ US Census Bureau. (n.d.). American Community Survey 2022 5-Year Estimates, Table S1810: Disability Characteristics. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2021.S1810>