

January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Benjamin S. Barnes and Honorable Mark S. Chang
RE: HB 98

Dear Chairman Barnes and Vice Chairman Chang:

I support both SB 185 and HB 98: the Co-Navigation (CN) Service Program.

I am born Deaf with the genetic I got from my DeafBlind mother, so I am second generation of Deaf with retina pigmentosa disease. I have been supporting my aged DeafBlind mother and my aged Deaf father. This has been burdening on me and I have my limits to assist them due to the injuries from auto accident and my visions. I had assisted my mother with walking, shopping, or attending social events.

She had become more frustrated and isolated for two years during COVID. She had troubling time to find someone to assist her with navigating for so many years. Unfortunately, it had led her dealing with mental health issues. It occurs to other DeafBlind individuals too.

She is not able to navigate on her own and she is required to be accompanied by someone. She was very frustrated with the Metro Access driver as driver does not know American Sign Language (ASL). She needs to have CN who can sign ASL. She is delighted to know the surroundings with the sharing information by Co-Navigator. My father has limit mobility and skills, so my mother has very limited access. She was pleased that she could go out shopping with CN and CN guided her through the aisles and products on the shelves at grocery store. It's very good stimulating to her mind and spirit.

I am pleased that my mother has gained communication access by using the Communication Facilitator (CF). She can carry conversation comfortably with her friends, family members, medical offices, etc. with an assistance by CF through video platforms. It is very important for her to have some independence to socialize or to communicate with others.

I had witnessed my DB friends having opportunities to enjoy the outdoor activities with assistance by CN by feeding them the information of surroundings and guiding them safely during walking. My DB friend had someone to accompany her while running marathons.

We need to establish the trainings for co-navigators to provide better service to DeafBlind citizens; and training for DeafBlind to know how to use Co-Navigator. The availability of training resources is essential for anyone to learn and to understand how to navigate DeafBlind properly.

I support this bill and it will relieve my concerns for my DeafBlind mother and for my future. I want to be known that Co-Navigating Service Program is out there for DeafBlind citizens in the state of Maryland and I will use this service when it is needed.

Respectfully,

Eleanor Brown

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