



February 6, 2024

Economic Matters Committee
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Economic Matters Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Baltimore City Association of the Deaf (BCAD) regarding **HB 426-Open Captioning Movie Bill**, sponsored by Delegate Harry Bhandari. The Bill is to ensure that each movie theater is required to add onscreen captions on all movies at least two (2) times per week, in an effort to make moviegoing more accessible. Currently, the rule does not require movie theaters to add captions.

The BCAD Board strongly feels that the bill would benefit our citizens in the City of Baltimore of all ages and backgrounds. This includes children and adults learning to read, senior citizens, veterans, people with learning developmental disabilities and English language learners, the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing population.

In case you may not know, we are sharing the current information regarding accommodations to bring us on the same page. Our current federal law that was passed in 2017 requires movie theaters to provide accommodation devices to those with hearing loss, learning challenges, and second language learning. These accommodation devices come in two forms: glasses and the “cup holder” device. While it’s an improvement allowing accessibility, they still provide challenges for theater goers.

Often the accommodation devices fail to stay reliable for the entire movie. The captions or technical equipment would stop working or would have had the wrong set up that the captions were not the right one for the given movie. This can happen anytime during the movie. Often these malfunctions had to be resolved in person and this often means the moviegoer would have to depart the movie room and miss a good chunk of movie to get the issue resolved. I wonder if you or any member of your organization has experienced these frustrations. It has happened to me numerous times. It gets old when the problem repeats over and over.

Another issue we experience is that the equipment was not designed as a “one-size-fits-all.” The glasses are often too big for children. If a person already has a pair of glasses, then it’s a

challenge to wear two glasses at the same time. The “cup holder” equipment is also awkward to use. The gooseneck has to be adjusted so the screen stays in its position. Sometimes, it’s necessary that we have to hold it manually. Some moviegoers would sit awkwardly to accommodate the view of the “cup holder” equipment and the big movie screen. Sometimes, a tall person would need to slouch until it comes to eye to eye with the equipment and the movie screen. Sometimes, a child would find it challenging to use the equipment when it’s higher than the child’s sitting height. Although the concept of having closed captions at a movie theater is great, the equipment doesn’t always suit everyone. We would like to see them going to movies without any issues and allow them to watch movies with pleasure and in comfort.

According to the articles from “Video Captions Benefit Everyone” written by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and “Does Closed Captioning Improve Reading and Literacy in Children” written by Elise Lewis in March of 2021, the study has shown that captioning proves to a greatly improve reading levels. It has shown to improve their reading speed and fluency, word knowledge, decoding, vocabulary acquisition, word recognition, reading comprehension and oral reading notes. Not only these benefits, captioning has helped to alleviate anxiety and stress. This has proven to also benefit children and English language learners.

The bill is designed with the flexibility in the intention of working with the larger audience to allow them to get comfortable with open captioning and to allow us to fully understand the entire movie. International countries have movies with subtitles and they are widely accepted. This bill is a win-win for all movie fans. It allows the entire population the same pleasure of watching movies at the theater. Also, our hearing members find it beneficial to them because of background noises and sometimes the speaker is not clear and they miss what they said, captioning helped them to catch up with what they were saying.

Having the law set in place would guarantee open captioned movies for all to benefit! We do not believe that open captioned movies will have a major negative impact on the community. Theaters also would not have a major negative impact. The theaters would not suffer over two open captioned movies per week. They will gain more as they will not need more staff to handle open captioning. This bill is a major win/win situation for all movie goers and theaters.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter and I appreciate your support on HB 426.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jacob Leffler".

Jacob Leffler
President
bcadeaf2020@gmail.com