



February 6, 2024

Economic Matters Committee  
House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street, Room 231  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: House Bill 426 - Letter of Support

Dear Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of the Howard County Association of the Deaf (HCAD), I respectfully ask that you pass House Bill (HB) #426 which would allow deaf and hard-of-hearing Maryland citizens to have the equivalent and equitable experience so that they can enjoy the same movie experience as others.

The closed captioning devices have proven to be ineffective and in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Many of us had negative experiences with these devices that made the screening less accessible.

I would like to remove the norm that the captions are only for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community because this is no longer true. Studies have shown that not only do they benefit the deaf and hard-of-hearing but they also benefit those who do not have hearing loss.

Many viewers find captions beneficial, particularly as the nature of video changes. The shows feature heavy accents that can be hard to understand. Many of our family members and friends, who are not deaf, have come to rely on captions. It has become their standard way of watching TV shows and movies. It adds information you wouldn't get without, e.g., the name or lyrics of a song being played, or a whispered comment by a character off-screen or in the crowd.

Additionally, captions are a very simple and effective way to help a child learn. Students can increase vocabulary, comprehension, and reading skills by watching programs with captions

turned on. The captions help children learn sight words and reinforce reading skills. The same also applies to foreign speakers who are learning English but also it improves their listening comprehension, word recognition, and decoding skills.

The request to have all movie theaters provide at least two open-captioning screenings per week is the practical, reasonable way forward.

Please consider passing this bill so it becomes a permanent fixture of accessibility in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area for its expansive deaf and hard-of-hearing community as well as for other citizens without hearing loss.

Thank you,

***Elke Pieters***

Elke Pieters  
HCAD President