



TO: Economic Matters
FROM: Autism Society of Maryland
DATE: February 6, 2024
RE: HB0426 - Letter of Support

The Autism Society of Maryland (AUSOM), formerly the Howard County Autism Society, would like to express its strong support for HB0426, a bill requiring open caption moving showings in theaters at least once a month.

More than a decade ago, one of our AUSOM parents went to a movie in Columbia, MD with her young Autistic daughter. When her daughter started to vocalize, stim and move about, the theater asked them to leave, saying they were disturbing other customers. Discouraged by the lack of access, she reached out to the AMC Theater at Columbia Mall and asked if they would be willing to host sensory-friendly movies a few times a month at quieter times for local Autism families. AMC agreed to a test of the program at its Columbia location. As word spread and the program grew more popular, it spread to AMC theaters throughout the country, becoming a national model for inclusion that benefits thousands in the Autism community each year.

The issue addressed in HB0426 is a similar and one well worth our support to provide greater access and inclusion for all community members.

Captioning, also known as same-language subtitles, benefits everyone who watches videos (children, adolescents, college students, and adults). More than 100 empirical studies document that captioning a video improves comprehension of, attention to, and memory of the video. Captions are particularly beneficial for persons watching videos in their non-native language, for children and adults learning to read, and for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Additionally, studies have shown that hearing loss is much more common among older adults, and 91% of adults with hearing loss are aged 50 and older.

Most importantly, the bill provides communities with the assurance and peace of mind that they can access the movie without using devices or other methods like other people who go to the cinema.



Due to the device problems i.e. battery failure, lack of connectivity, or sporadic connectivity that leads to dropped dialogue, HB0426 will require all movie theaters in the State of Maryland to provide open captioning for at least two screenings each week.

Maryland has an opportunity to take a leadership role nationally on this issue that will benefit both movie-goers and businesses. There will be waves of new people buying movie theatre tickets in Maryland. Gallaudet University is in the backyard, and folks from there will come to Maryland to enjoy watching movies. Also, this will not only benefit the Deaf but also everyone else with hearing loss, foreign speakers, etc.

THANK YOU for supporting HB0426!

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melissa Rosenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Melissa Rosenberg
Executive Director