



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 4, 2024

Senate Bill 1084

**State Government – Commission for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 1084 establishes the Commission for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing as an independent unit of State government to provide and advocate for accessible and comprehensive services, and foster inclusivity, equal opportunities, and improved quality of life, for individuals who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing.

This commission plays a crucial role in advancing advocacy efforts for individuals who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing. Its primary objective is to champion policies, programs, and initiatives addressing the specific needs of this community within Maryland. Through an external review, the commission will aim to identify and rectify any existing gaps in services. Additionally, the commission will actively work to reduce barriers faced by deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals across the state, where over 1.2 million residents fall into this demographic.¹

Recognizing the inherent value of each individual and understanding the distinct needs of those with visual and auditory impairments are essential elements for ensuring the protection and well-being of this marginalized community. The commission brings together a vast network of professionals with firsthand experiences and the necessary knowledge to provide valuable recommendations. These recommendations will contribute to ongoing efforts aimed at enhancing the quality of life for individuals with visual and auditory impairments.

¹ <https://www.dcnnewsnow.com/news/local-news/maryland/frederick-county-md/maryland-deaf-community-center-set-to-come-to-frederick/>

The MCC supports initiatives that enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities, firmly believing that this commission will significantly contribute to achieving greater equity for this underserved population.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **SB 1084**.

Thank you for your consideration.