

Dear honorable members of the committee:

I am writing this to fully support the establishment of the Commission of the Deaf, Deaf Blind, and Hard of Hearing (SB 1084). To focus on improving case management services but especially for the Deaf Blind people; State of Maryland needs to be able to provide those people with full support.

Here's my story; My boyfriend was deaf/blind, we were together for 16 years. We have one daughter who is 16 years old but he had to leave us a few years ago because the state of Maryland couldn't provide the best service for him or any Deaf Blind people.

When he came to Maryland, he was able to see pretty well. We enjoyed our activities together but after our daughter was born, his sight declined and become blind. He was left without any knowledge related to blind, he felt very rejected and frustrated without any excellent training. I helped lead him to work with DORS. DORS made the referral with the CLB known as Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind and TCS. To get their services took forever to get in because of funding and lack of staff supporting to train the clients who are Deaf/Blind and their service with the SSP as Support Service Provider to assist with transportation is very limited per month. It was supposed to start in a few weeks but exaggerated to months and years.

They provided a very limited number of days to train such as mobility, learning to use the braille, transport to and from and more caused him plenty of frustration and depression since the state of Maryland does not have Deaf/Blind Residential Program that can provide housing, ongoing training, assist with finding the job, full service with transportation assistance. At that time, my relationship with my boyfriend was difficult because they couldn't provide what he needs and I had to provide him with a lot of assistant by helping him find a job twice, set up the interview with interpreters, explore for some additional training which putting me in great deal of stress of role as a person to him. I felt like I was his SSP instead of his girlfriend, even to support his emotions when he became frustrated with often being canceled with the training or transportation which led him to experience depression.

Because of the lack of services that can be provided for him, he had no choice but to leave and reside in Louisiana where they DO have full service to provide everything that Deaf/Blind needs. He is now happy where he is. He not only lost the relationship with me but, also more importantly, to our daughter, who he has missed seeing her growing up. As of now, he averages seeing her once a year for up to a week... or two if we are lucky.

It is definitely needed for the State of Maryland to acknowledge and take full responsibility to support people with disabilities, but especially the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals, as we have particular communication needs and issues. The Commission would be able to set up programs, provide direct case management services, and also develop bills that would help improve lives to put on the table for the legislation.

Thank you for your attention and please consider supporting this bill to establish the Commission to be successful.

Dawn Padon