

January 28, 2024

Maryland CN Committee

Dear Committee Members:

It is with great personal and professional pleasure that I support the House Bill 98 and Senate Bill 185 for the creation of a statewide Co-Navigation program for the more the 32,000 Marylanders who are DeafBlind. The establishment of this essential program will help offer citizens who are DeafBlind access to the community resources, amenities and medical services which would otherwise be unreachable without these crucial services.

More than fifty states across the nation have addressed the community and communication access needs of its citizens who are DeafBlind by establishing Co-Navigation Programs such as the one you are exploring. Through testimonials from DeafBlind individuals who have benefited from these services we have learned that recipients of these services have realized increased independence and improved quality of life. Additionally, family members and friends who were previously utilized to offer these services have also seen their quality of life enhanced.

The late Helen Keller stated that individuals who are DeafBlind are amongst the loneliest people in the world. This is seen in the lives of the fastest growing segment of the population, older adults with age-related vision and hearing loss or children born with severe disabilities whose access to the community is limited by their inability to hear and see. Also, individuals of working-age whose employment status is too frequently jeopardized by a lack of community and communication access. The implementation of such a program in the state of Maryland will address the 60% unemployment rate of working-age citizens who are DeafBlind.

I look forward to the opportunity to further speak on the importance of developing this essential Co-Navigation Program in Maryland. Thank you for your efforts and continued commitment to enhancing the lives of Marylanders who are DeafBlind.

With warm regards,



Cynthia L. Ingraham, EdD
East Central Representative

Helen Keller National Center
National Headquarters
141 Middle Neck Road
Sands Point, NY 11050-1299
Voice: 516.944.8900
Videophone: 516.570.3635
Fax: 516.944.7302

Susan Ruzenski
Executive Director

New England
Watertown, MA

Mid-Atlantic
Sands Point, NY

East Central
Laurel, MD

Southeast
Atlanta, GA

North Central
Moline, IL

South Central
Austin, TX

Great Plains
Olathe, KS

Rocky-Mountain
Denver, CO

Southwest
San Diego, CA

Northwest
Seattle, WA