

# **SB185 - Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program -**

Uploaded by: Abigail Snyder

Position: FAV

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 Baltimore District

**Written Testimony**  
**Senate Bill 185 - Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing -**  
**Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program - Established**  
**Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee – January 30,**  
**2024**  
**Support**

**Background:** Senate Bill 185 would establish Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program in the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide co-navigation services at no cost to deafblind individuals in the State. Additionally, it will statutorily define "co-navigation services," which are services that provide visual and environmental information or sighted services to assist with accessibility.

**Written Comments:** The Baltimore Jewish Council represents The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all of its agencies. This includes the Jewish Connection Network, which has an entire department dedicated to ensuring that every member of our community, regardless of their background or abilities, can fully embrace Jewish life. Whether they need guidance, assistance, or simply a sense of belonging, JCN is available to help individuals and families facing various challenges.

The U.S. hard-of-hearing population parallels the U.S. Jewish population. And while there are no resources to correlate deaf statistics to the Jewish population, there is no reason to assume the percentage of deaf Jews is other than that of the general population. It can be estimated that 0.22 percent of U.S. Jews, more than 14,000 people, are deaf; 2.2 percent of U.S. Jews, nearly 142,000 people, have a lot of trouble hearing; and 2.05 percent of Jews worldwide, some 271,256 people, have disabling hearing impairment. Additionally, blindness due to Usher Syndrome is more common among people of Ashkenazi (eastern and central European) Jewish or French Acadian heritage than in the general population.

By supporting this legislation, you are easing the access of resources for the Deafblind community. **For these reasons, the Baltimore Jewish Councils asks for a favorable report on SB185.**

*The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of The Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.*

# **Good afternoon SB.pdf**

Uploaded by: Blaise Delahoussaye

Position: FAV

Good afternoon, Chair and Vice Chair of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee/ Appropriations Committee and members of the Committee. My name is Blaise Delahoussaye. I live in Rockville, MD.

I am DeafBlind.

I am here in support of SB 185; the Co-Navigation bill. This bill is important because it will give DeafBlind people in Maryland greater independence without relying on family members and/or friends.

Passing this bill will improve my life by having less barriers such as giving testimonials in the future without relying on my friends as a favor. Due to my privacy, I can go for medical and legal appointments effectively with trained co-navigators. In addition, I will be able to go grocery shopping for my family and take me to the airports for family visits globally. Lastly, this will provide me with an opportunity to access everything and greater confidence and productivity in my daily life.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I ask for a favorable report on SB 185.

## **Good afternoon 2.pdf**

Uploaded by: Bruce Denhart

Position: FAV

January 29, 2024

TO: Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan RE:  
S 185

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan:

Good afternoon, my name is Bruce Denhart. I live in College Park; MD and I am Deaf/Low Vision.

I am here in support of S 185, the Co-Navigators bill. This bill is important because it provides visual and environmental information or sighted services to assist with communication accessibility in an individual's preferred language and communication mode and to assist with accessing an individual's physical surroundings and making informed decisions about those surrounding.

Passing this bill will improve my life by not worry about missing information because I couldn't see very far so need to depend someone with me to give the visual and environmental information also have trouble see the live interpreters on stage so need person to sign close to me what the live interpreter on stage saying.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I ask for a favorable report on S 185.

# **SB185 Deaf-Blind CoNavigation Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Cody Drinkwater

Position: FAV



People on the Go of Maryland

**SB 185**

**Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing -  
Deaf/Blind Co-Navigation Program - Established**

*Establishing a Deaf/Blind Co-Navigation Services Program in the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, to provide co-navigation services at no cost to deaf/blind individuals in the State; and defining Co-Navigation Services as services providing visual and environmental information or sighted services to assist with communication accessibility in an individual's preferred language and communication mode, and to assist with accessing an individual's physical surroundings and making informed decisions about those surroundings.*

**Position: Support**

**January 30, 2024**

**Sponsored by Delegate Kaufman**

**Assigned to House Appropriations Committee**

**Written by Cody Drinkwater**

**People On the Go of Maryland**

Honorable Chairperson, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee:

People On the Go of Maryland (POG) is a statewide self-advocacy organization, ran for and by those with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) and our mission is to promote self-advocacy throughout the state.



People On the Go provides this written testimony and support for Senate Bill 185 (SB185). We support this bill because:

- Any bill that promotes accessible technology for those who are deaf/blind and hard of hearing should be supported.
- Co-navigation services would be free of charge for those who are deaf/blind and hard of hearing, who would otherwise have to rely upon technology that can be prohibitively expensive.
- A policy of making co-navigation services free to the deaf/blind and hard of hearing, also sets a good precedent for any future bills regarding accessible technology.

For these reasons, People On the Go advises a favorable report for SB 185. Thank you for your consideration.

Should you have any questions. Please contact Mat Rice.

Thank you,

Mat Rice, Executive Director

M: 410-925-5706

E: [mat@pogmd.org](mailto:mat@pogmd.org)

# **Maryland Catholic Conference\_FAV\_SB185.pdf**

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

January 29, 2024

**Senate Bill 185**  
**Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing – Deafblind Co–Navigation Services**  
**Program – Established**  
**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 185** establishes the Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program in the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide co-navigation services to deafblind individuals in the State.

Senate Bill 185 aims to offer co-navigation services to deafblind individuals in the State, ensuring accessibility in communication and decision-making. The services provided by Senate Bill 185 include: (I) Offering visual and environmental information or sighted services to enhance communication accessibility; (II) Delivering services in the individual's preferred language and communication mode; (III) assisting the individual in accessing their physical surroundings and making informed decisions about their environment.

Deafblindness affects approximately 2.47 million Americans, with individuals over the age of 65 constituting 63% of this community.<sup>1</sup> The condition creates challenges in accessing both visual and auditory information, requiring external support for understanding the surrounding environment. Senate Bill 185 seeks to bridge this gap by providing autonomy and decision-making power to the deafblind community. Currently, only 1,276 deafblind individuals nationwide are receiving co-navigation services.<sup>2</sup> The proposed program would significantly expand support, advocating for programming, services, and policies to enhance the quality of life for individuals with deafblindness. The Maryland Catholic Conference strongly supports

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<sup>1</sup> <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.helenkeller.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2023%2F06%2FAmerican-Community-Survey-Data-Summaries-2021-Updated-6-24.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nfadb.org/resources/Documents/SSP\\_Co-navigator%20Position%20Paper-Final.pdf](https://www.nfadb.org/resources/Documents/SSP_Co-navigator%20Position%20Paper-Final.pdf)

policies that improve the lives of individuals with disabilities and believes that this program will contribute to greater equity for an underserved population.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **SB185**.

Thank you for your consideration.

# **Testimony SB 185 Ed Knight.pdf**

Uploaded by: Edward Knight

Position: FAV

To the Chair and Vice Chair of the Education, Environment, and Energy Committee and members of the Committee.

My name is Ed Knight. I live in Frederick, MD. I am the husband of Steven Frank, who is DeafBlind. We are both retirees living in Independent Living in a retirement community, Homewood at Frederick. I am sighted. We have been together for 41 years, and he went blind more than 20 years ago.

I am here in support of SB 185; the Co-Navigation bill. This bill is important because I am the person who ordinarily provides Co-Navigator services for Steven, and what happens if something happens to me, who will provide those services for him?

By Co-Navigator services, I mean driving him to shopping and appointments, guiding him, and doing light interpreting from ASL to English and English to tactile ASL. Although I am hearing, a Deaf person could provide Co-Navigator services just as well or better than I do.

A Co-Navigator program with the state will enable Steven to continue to remain in Independent Living if I enter the hospital, become disabled, develop dementia, or die. Even if he moved to Assisted Living, he would still need Co-Navigator services to live a full life.

Passing this bill will also improve my life by helping me avoid burn out.

We also have many friends in the DeafBlind community, and I also have concern for them and for their families.

A Co-Navigator Services program would have the added benefit of providing employment opportunities for the Deaf community as ASL users are the natural pool of talent for such a program.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in writing. I ask for a favorable report on SB 185.

Ed Knight  
500 Pearson Circle  
Apt 2026  
Frederick, MD 21702

# **Martinez S 185 Testimony (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Edwin Martinez

Position: FAV

Edwin Martinez  
803 Geronimo Drive  
Frederick, MD 21701

January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan  
RE: S 185

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan:

My name is Edwin "Eddie" Martinez Jr. I am DeafBlind since birth. I strongly support this bill (S 185) relating to CoNavigation Service in the entire state of Maryland. Maryland has high numbers of DeafBlind individuals who live all over the state. We, DeafBlind community, rely heavily on CoNavigation service for countless purposes such as, reading standardized print materials, transportation to different places, Human Guiding, basic facilitating needs, and visual environmental feeds. I can add more in depth but due to time limitations here at the Hearing session. Each DeafBlind member of the community is diverse and not the same regarding communication needs and experiences in their everyday life.

My Personal experience using CoNavigation service for decades. I faced a lot of challenges with transportation, bank, shopping, and recreational activities. Without the CoNavigation service, my personal life will NOT be the same and isolated. I need the CoNavigator to accompany me through my everyday life and function as human equity.

Thank you for allowing me to share my cherished testimony with all of you. Also, thank you for showing your favor this S 185.

Sincerely,

Eddie Martinez Jr



## **SB 185**

Uploaded by: Eleanor Brown

Position: FAV

January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Benjamin S. Barnes and Honorable Mark S. Chang  
RE: HB 98

Dear Chairman Barnes and Vice Chairman Chang:

I support both SB 185 and HB 98: the Co-Navigation (CN) Service Program.

I am born Deaf with the genetic I got from my DeafBlind mother, so I am second generation of Deaf with retina pigmentosa disease. I have been supporting my aged DeafBlind mother and my aged Deaf father. This has been burdening on me and I have my limits to assist them due to the injuries from auto accident and my visions. I had assisted my mother with walking, shopping, or attending social events.

She had become more frustrated and isolated for two years during COVID. She had troubling time to find someone to assist her with navigating for so many years. Unfortunately, it had led her dealing with mental health issues. It occurs to other DeafBlind individuals too.

She is not able to navigate on her own and she is required to be accompanied by someone. She was very frustrated with the Metro Access driver as driver does not know American Sign Language (ASL). She needs to have CN who can sign ASL. She is delighted to know the surroundings with the sharing information by Co-Navigator. My father has limit mobility and skills, so my mother has very limited access. She was pleased that she could go out shopping with CN and CN guided her through the aisles and products on the shelves at grocery store. It's very good stimulating to her mind and spirit.

I am pleased that my mother has gained communication access by using the Communication Facilitator (CF). She can carry conversation comfortably with her friends, family members, medical offices, etc. with an assistance by CF through video platforms. It is very important for her to have some independence to socialize or to communicate with others.

I had witnessed my DB friends having opportunities to enjoy the outdoor activities with assistance by CN by feeding them the information of surroundings and guiding them safely during walking. My DB friend had someone to accompany her while running marathons.

We need to establish the trainings for co-navigators to provide better service to DeafBlind citizens; and training for DeafBlind to know how to use Co-Navigator. The availability of training resources is essential for anyone to learn and to understand how to navigate DeafBlind properly.

I support this bill and it will relieve my concerns for my DeafBlind mother and for my future. I want to be known that Co-Navigating Service Program is out there for DeafBlind citizens in the state of Maryland and I will use this service when it is needed.

Respectfully,

*Eleanor Brown*

Eleanor Brown  
13901 Highstream Place  
Germantown MD 20874  
[EleanorMD90@gmail.com](mailto:EleanorMD90@gmail.com)  
240-449-3458

# **SB185\_Deafblind Co-Navigation\_KennedyKrieger\_Suppo**

Uploaded by: Emily Arneson

Position: FAV



**DATE:** January 30, 2024      **COMMITTEE:** Senate Education, Energy, and Environment  
**BILL NO:** Senate Bill 185  
**BILL TITLE:** Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Prgm – Est.  
**POSITION:** Support

**Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 185 - Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program – Established.**

**Bill Summary:**

Senate Bill 185 establishes the Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program within the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This new program will provide co-navigation services to deafblind individuals by providing visual, environmental or sighted services to assist with communication accessibility.

**Background:**

Kennedy Krieger Institute provides specialized services to patients nationally and internationally. Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger’s services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

The Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) at Kennedy Krieger Institute is proud to be Maryland’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (UCEDD) and a member of the national Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD).

MCDD links the community to vital services, research, and information to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Our mission is to provide leadership that advances the inclusion of people with intellectual, developmental, and other disabilities through preservice preparation and training; research and evaluation; community service and technical assistance; and information dissemination.

**Rationale:**

A deafblind individual is an individual that experiences some level of deafness and blindness. There are approximately 40,000 deafblind individuals in the US with 10,000 being children.<sup>1</sup> Inclusion and implementation of deafblind navigation services can increase safety and accessibility for deafblind individuals. Children and individuals in the deaf and hard of hearing community have higher rates of acquiring injuries due to their reduced ability to recognize or hear hazardous situations.<sup>2</sup> Communication breakdowns can occur with deafblind individuals in public settings (e.g., public transportation) particularly when crucial transportation information is not accessible to individuals with sensory impairments. Co-navigation services such as visual displays and mobile applications provided by public transit networks can help provide resources to deafblind individuals to improve safety and accessibility.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, deafblind individuals may require the use of co-navigation services to access basic amenities like food from the grocery store or prescriptions from the pharmacy. Without co-navigation services deafblind individuals may either be dependent on a family or community member to complete those errands or unsafely navigate their community by themselves. Co-navigation services can increase independence of deafblind individuals while providing deafblind individuals the support they need to safely navigate their environment.

**Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 185.**

Emily Arneson – AVP Government Affairs – [arneson@kennedykrieger.org](mailto:arneson@kennedykrieger.org) or 443-631-2188

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<sup>1</sup> National Center of Deafblindness, *About the National Center on Deafblindness* (accessed Jan. 24, 2024), <https://www.nationaldb.org/about/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mann et al, *Children with Hearing Loss and Increased Risk of Injury*, *Annals of Family Medicine* (Nov. 2007), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2094020/>, doi: 10.1360/afm.740.

<sup>3</sup> Omoso, *The Importance of Accessible Public Transportation: How Technology is Improving Mobility for Deaf People*, *Unspoken ASL* (Feb, 2023), <https://www.unspokenasl.com/aslblogs/the-importance-of-accessible-public-transportation-how-technology-is-improving-mobility-for-deaf-people/>.

**Guy SB0185 PDF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Heather Guy

Position: FAV

Subject: Support for SB0185/HB0098

Date: January 30, 2024

From: Heather Guy, National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

[hguy403@comcast.net](mailto:hguy403@comcast.net)

803 Outten Road, Salisbury, Maryland 21804

To: House Appropriations Committee

I am testifying for this bill as a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland. Please support SB0185/HB0098, a bill to create the co-navigation program for deafblind people in Maryland. I began losing my hearing when I was four years old and have been wearing hearing aids continuously since that time. I began losing my sight when I was a teenager. Getting access to information is very difficult for me and a co-navigator could be helpful. I am a wife, a parent, and an employed adult. I want to become more active in community life but cannot because of the lack of a co-navigator.

I am glad that the bill says that this will be a statewide program, I hope that it really will become statewide. Living on the Eastern Shore, we do not get many helpful programs that are otherwise found in the rest of the state.

Please vote in favor of SB0185/HB0098. Give me and the deafblind community a chance to receive important information so that we can participate in all aspects of community life. This will be an important step towards equality.

# **Toothman SB0185 PDF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Janice Toothman

Position: FAV



Subject: Support for SB0185/HB0098  
Date: January 30, 2024

From: Janice Toothman  
[toothmanjanice@gmail.com](mailto:toothmanjanice@gmail.com)  
12608 Milburn Lane, Bowie, MD 20715-1612

To: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

I am testifying as a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland in support of the Co-Navigator bill SB0185/HB0098. As a Deafblind Marylander, who has received services from the former Support Service Providers (SSPs) now Co-Navigators, I know the need within the Deafblind community. Due to experiencing different degrees of vision and hearing loss, many Deafblind individuals are socially isolated from family, friends, and the communities in which they reside. COVID-19 has made this all too clear to all of us. But for those of us whose communication methods and preferences differ from society, it can be a daunting challenge.

This Bill intends to reduce those communication and navigational barriers Deafblind Marylanders encounter when they seek to engage in social discourse, purchase groceries, or attend religious services. It is important to recognize that Deaf blindness can occur across the lifespan of all ages. I lost my hearing when I was of working age, but others have lost it as children and as senior citizens. I hope that the training and recruitment of Co-Navigators goes across all counties in Maryland to ensure that Deafblind individuals in rural areas have an equal chance of obtaining Co-Navigators to suit their needs as those in urban areas.

There are two common daily events I will share in which using CoNavigators improved the situation. First, the grocery store which is close to my house is short staffed and frequently has no one to assist me in finding my groceries nor are they familiar in using my assistive listening device. The CoNavigators give me the opportunity to shop independently and use my preferred communication device without having to go into an in-depth explanation on what it is and how it works to the grocery store staff. The CoNavigators allow me to “browse items” if I am not sure what exactly I need without having the grocery staff pressuring me to hurry up. Second, when I am attending church, they orient me to the room’s floor plan by describing the layout. They provide protactile communication to let me know when the speaker or audience is laughing or singing. They inform me when we are to stand and sit. This helps me feel a part of the congregation and not separate due to my Deaf blindness. They also help me locate friends to talk to after the service.

SB0185/HB0098 will enrich the lives of all Deafblind Marylanders across the state. The Co-Navigation program will help the Maryland Deafblind to achieve independence and greater autonomy. Please vote in favor of SB0185/HB0098.

# **Testify for CN Bill.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kevin Steffy

Position: FAV

Chair Barnes and Vice Chair Chang, thank you for your time to read this. My name is Kevin Steffy. I have been working with the DeafBlind community in Maryland by providing Communication Facilitators (CF) who will facilitate the conversation between DeafBlind individuals and anyone on any kind of video conferencing like Zoom, Facetime, Videophone/ VRS, Skype, Duo, etc. since 2021. I have been noticing that after CF has done their jobs then left, DeafBlind individuals become isolated and leave behind with no access to what happens out there and struggle to go out and do whatever. I believe that it is very important that a Co-Navigator (CN) to be provided so a person can guide them to wherever they want to go to like grocery, doctor, see family/friend. I think that CF person also can be CN after their CF job is done.

Our governor, Wes Moore's quote "Leave No One Behind". We can't leave those DeafBlind individuals behind. I am encouraging you to support this bill. Thank you for your time to read my testify.

**DRMtestimonySB185.pdf**

Uploaded by: Leslie Margolis

Position: FAV



Empowerment. Integration. Equality.

1500 Union Ave., Suite 2000, Baltimore, MD 21211

[www.DisabilityRightsMD.org](http://www.DisabilityRightsMD.org)

Phone: 410.727.6352

**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**Senate Bill 185: Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing—Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program—  
Established**

**Date: January 30, 2024**

**Position: Support**

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the protection and advocacy organization for the state of Maryland; the mission of the organization, part of a national network of similar agencies, is to advocate for the legal rights of people with disabilities throughout the state. One of the mandated purposes of DRM's legal work is to ensure that people with disabilities are included in their communities and that they have access to the supports and services that will make living and participating in community life possible. Senate Bill 185 would further this goal by establishing the Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program within the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide co-navigators to support people who are deafblind; co-navigators relay visual and environmental information to individuals who are deafblind in the individuals' preferred language and communication mode. The program would be free to individuals with deafblindness.

A co-navigator is not a decisionmaker or aide; rather, by providing information about an individual's environment and physical surroundings, the co-navigator supports the individual with deafblindness by giving them information that empowers the individuals and enables them to make decisions and live more independently.

An individual's zip code should not dictate whether they have meaningful access to the world. By dictating the creation of a statewide co-navigation program, Senate Bill 185 will promote equity by ensuring that individuals with deafblindness throughout the state of Maryland have access to co-navigators. For these reasons, DRM supports Senate Bill 185.

For more information or if questions, contact: Leslie Seid Margolis, Managing Attorney and Policy Counsel, [lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org](mailto:lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org) or 443-692-2505.

**MDAD CN Written Testimony - SB 185.pdf**

Uploaded by: MDAD President MDAD President

Position: FAV



**Maryland Association of the Deaf**  
**Written Testimony**  
**SB 185 – Co-Navigation Services Program**  
**Tuesday, January 30, 2024**

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**Vice President**

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**Secretary**

Tiasha Bera

**Treasurer**

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**Board Members**

Vikki Porter

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Blaise Delahoussaye

Tori Reeves

Thelma Schroeder

The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization that protects the interests of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders concerning accessibility and equity issues. We are advocating for the passage of SB 185 sponsored by Senator Washington regarding the DeafBlind Co-Navigation Services Program. There are approximately 1.2 million Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals living in the State of Maryland.

There are around 32,000 DeafBlind people living in the State of Maryland who want to live independently and safely. MDAD heard stories from individuals where their life was jeopardized when they were doing errands on their own. A Co-Navigator will provide them visual and environmental information since they cannot see and cannot hear. They need a specific person who knows how to communicate with them. Many people gave up their time and volunteered their time to support the DeafBlind Community. DeafBlind people experience challenges to ask people to support them in many ways. It is now time to recognize the needs of theirs and get people paid for the task.

Without a Co-Navigator, a DeafBlind person could be killed by the train or bus or car when they walk across the rail or street. Without one, a DeafBind person could be given the wrong medication by the pharmacy which could harm their life. Now it is the time for the State to recognize DeafBlind people’s needs and we look forward to seeing the State of Maryland to be the first state to pass this kind of law.

We look forward to a favorable bill on SB 185.

Thank you,

MDAD Board of Directors

# **SB 185 - Support - Deaf Blind Co-Navigators.pdf**

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV





## Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
SB 185: Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program -  
Established  
January 30, 2024  
Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) is an independent public policy organization that creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. Our vision is that people with and without disabilities in Maryland live, learn, work, and play together.

### WHAT does this legislation do?

- DeafBlind (Deaf-Blind, deafblind) is the term used for people with a combination of hearing and vision loss that varies for each individual. SB 185 establishes the Deafblind Co-Navigation Services Program in the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH). The services would be free.
- This program uses co-navigators to support people who are DeafBlind. Co-navigators relay visual and environmental information in the preferred language and communication mode to the person who is DeafBlind. A co-navigator is not an interpreter. A co-navigator does not make decisions for the person who is DeafBlind.
- Through the Co-Navigation Services Program, people who are DeafBlind will have better access to physical surroundings and will be able to make informed decisions.

### WHY is this legislation important?

- **People who are DeafBlind want co-navigation services because they align with best practices.** Advocates from the DeafBlind community support co-navigation because it promotes informed decisions and self-empowerment. Co-navigators allow people who are DeafBlind to live more independently by having greater access to the environment around them.
- **A statewide program ensures equity for people who are DeafBlind across Maryland.** In 2022, there were 188 children identified as DeafBlind in Maryland schools, according to the most recent data reported by the National Center on Deaf-Blindness. This report also finds that people who are DeafBlind come from all races, ethnicities, and genders. But access to supports, such as appropriate special education services in early childhood education, varies by geography. A statewide program promotes better communication accessibility for all people who are Deafblind in Maryland.

It is critical that people with disabilities have full access to the supports they need and want to thrive. This bill ensures that people who are DeafBlind receive empowering supports for independent living. For these reasons, the Council supports SB 185.

Contact: Dr. Stephanie Dolamore, Deputy Director, [SDolamore@md-council.org](mailto:SDolamore@md-council.org)

217 E. Redwood Street, Suite 1300 • Baltimore, MD 21202 • 410.767.3670 • [md-council.org](http://md-council.org)

Dee Sapp, *Chairperson* • Rachel London, Esq., *Executive Director*

# **Collins S 185 Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV

Steven D. Collins, PhD  
3393 Leisure World Blvd  
Silver Spring, MD 2090

January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan  
RE: S 185

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan:

We support this bill because we believe that deafblind Marylanders shall utilize their autonomy at its fullest, one of the ways they can do that is by having a co-navigator. That will help them come out of their homes and be organically part of the community at large as they have a lot to offer to the citizens of Maryland.

We hope that the passage of this Senate Bill (S 185) is actualized and becomes a reality. We look forward to a productive and equitable lives for deafblind Marylanders.

Thank you.

Steven D. Collins,  
DeafBlind Educator  
Retired Professor of Gallaudet University  
su

# **DEAFBLIND CAMP OF MARYLAND LETTERHEAD.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV



**DEAFBLIND CAMP OF MARYLAND, INC.**

1040 S. Beechfield Ave  
Baltimore Md. 21229

January 29, 2024

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan,

I trust this letter finds you well. We, the members of DeafBlind Marylanders, are writing to express our wholehearted support for Senate Bill S 185. We believe that this legislation holds great promise for enhancing the lives of DeafBlind individuals in our state by providing them with trained co-navigators.

For far too long, we have relied on the goodwill of volunteers with constrained schedules to assist us in navigating our surroundings and providing reading services for essential tasks such as reading mail and newspapers. The introduction of a formalized co-navigator program would empower us with greater independence, allowing us to lead more productive and equitable lives as citizens.

We eagerly anticipate the passage of Senate Bill S 185 and the subsequent implementation of the co-navigator program. The prospect of having trained professionals to guide us in our daily activities is not only a matter of convenience but also a crucial step towards fostering inclusivity and autonomy for DeafBlind Marylanders.

We extend our gratitude to the CN Bill Committee under the DeafBlind Camp of Maryland, and we appreciate their dedicated efforts in collaboration with the Maryland Association of the Deaf. Their hard work and advocacy have been instrumental in bringing Senate Bill S 185 to fruition, and we are thankful for their commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of DeafBlind individuals in our state.

In conclusion, we are hopeful for the swift passage of S 185 and the subsequent establishment of the co-navigator program. We believe that this initiative will contribute significantly to the well-being and independence of DeafBlind Marylanders.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to a future where the DeafBlind community can thrive with increased support and opportunities.

Sincerely,

Bruce Denhart, Board Member

# **Dundas S 185 Testimony (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV

Shane Dundas  
803 Geronimo Drive  
Frederick, MD 21701

January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan  
RE: S 185

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan:

My name is Shane Dundas, I'm a resident of Frederick and a citizen of the state of Maryland. I am thrilled to be testifying in favor of the Senate Bill 185 regarding the CoNavigation for the DeafBlind Marylanders.

I've been thrice trained Co-Navigator for many years volunteering for the DeafBlind community. I can see so much joy in DeafBlind people when they feel like they have full autonomy by using my services.

I know that the hearing Blind community have better access to visual information through environmental sounds, verbal conversations with people surrounding them, and may have other programs that assist them. DeafBlind do not hear, they use tactile sign language or ProTactile ASL. They rely on PTASL for visual information, that is where CN comes in.

By using CN services, it allows DeafBlind people to come out of isolation and become part of an active and thriving community as outstanding citizens. It not only benefits the DeafBlind people but also benefits those who interact with them. Can you imagine how many bridges are being built between the DeafBlind citizens and the community by using CN services?

This Senate Bill 185 is historic in the State of Maryland! I am elated that we have arrived at this point. I hope that you will support S 185 today and I look forward to its passage into law this Spring. I thank all the committee members and Honorable Senator Mary Washington, one of the bill sponsors, here today for their tremendous support and leadership for this Senate Bill 185.

Thank you.

Shane Dundas

# **HKNC Letter of Support MD CN Program 1-28-2024.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV



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

**MWADB S 185 (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV



January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan  
RE: S 185

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan:

We, the DeafBlind Marylanders, support this bill because we believe that it greatly benefits us and our livelihood as citizens. For many years, we have relied on volunteers with their limited schedule to guide us around to places that we need to go to and to provide us reading services (reading mail, newspaper, etc.). It would be nice to have trained co-navigators in the state that allow us to have greater independence.

We look forward to the passage of this Senate Bill (S 185) and having co-navigators as a reality. We look forward to our productive and equitable lives for DeafBlind Marylanders.

We thank the CN Bill Committee under Metro-Washington Association of the DeafBlind and with close collaboration with Maryland Association of the Deaf for their hard work in making S 185 a reality.

Thank you.

Bruce Denhart  
Acting President

CC: DeafBlind Community

MWADB is a non-profit organization where DeafBlind people and their friends meet on a regular basis for support, education, and advocacy. The DeafBlind members are people who have both some hearing and visual loss in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia.

**Reske S 185-HB98 Testimony.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV

Tuesday, January 30, 2024

Good Afternoon Chair and Vice Chair of the Education, Environment, and Energy Committee/ Appropriations Committee and members of the Committee.

My name is John Reske. I live in Rockville, Maryland.

I am here in support of SB 185/ HB 98; the Co-Navigation bill. This bill is important because after my 18 years drive any vehicles, it's no longer to drive any vehicles, its cause my vision has glaucoma then my eyes became losing in my sight, I could not see at night time as well, it's missing something to see enough, but I could not find some anything completed yet. Its mean just missing to find it. Take me longer to find something alike at home I drop piece on the floor then time to look for on the floor where I lose something. Evenly as take time to communication with a person who is Co Navigator CN with ASL and tactile with hands gather as connect its make easier to communication without sight and hearing. So alike example on the floor where the piece I drop something then take time to look for it. The CN person can help me to find a piece from the floor. Example hearing driver and guide with deaf blind became cause lock of communication with no ASL connection. Its harder to communicate. Where the piece to find from floor? No one be willing to help to deaf blind. Its completed deaf and blind. That why CN help to person where the piece on the floor. That mean CN can helpful to deaf blind to with CN to find the piece from the floor. CN showed the piece from the floor. Then CN/s hand grab softly through to other person 's hand to touch, deaf blind's hand connect hands gather to start using with ASL communicate gather, hand to hand gather, deafblind can't see and hear at all. their hands to connect hands to hands gather to communicate about a piece from the floor, let them know where the piece from the floor. That how it work to use hands gather. Along I had using ride the buses, cab, and van service. I had been difficult to communication with hearing driver for many years. The driver got wrong direction how to guide with the blind person. That why I have two combination with vision and hearing. It's not separate situation. Sometime I get wrong way while I ride the bus route. I looked up on bus schedule to make sure to read it. I have been using for reading with buses schedule and put down for what time on the buses route then I walk with my mobility cane. I got a bus came and I asked the driver for where the bus going to? I thought the direction were right tracking. I sat on the bus and I noticed that I got wrong way. I got off the bus and walk across the street for try go back right direction. that I did it. It/s happen to me for few times. Also I do still ride the transit

service its helpful to get driver gave me a ride schedule from home to appointment schedule by through to get a transit. The transit driver and I had been difficult to communication. They speak to me too fast. I told driver please speak need slow down please slow down with me. It's happened few times. Most of time hard to find a ride to contact them for help me las need time to time than not became delay to find a ride for another appointment with doctor office etc. Also I can't see the snow what look like how many inches of snow on the ground. My eyes had a hard time to see now ground how higher or less of few snow. My vision cause of "Blind snow".

Passing this bill will improve my life.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I ask for a favorable report on SB 185/HB. 98.

Respectfully,  
John Reske

CN Bill Committee Team

# **SBrown\_CN\_Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV

January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan  
RE: S 185

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan:

I support this bill because I believe that deafblind Marylanders shall utilize their autonomy at its fullest, one of the ways they can do that is by having a co-navigator. That will help them come out of their homes and be organically part of the community at large as they have a lot to offer to the citizens of Maryland.

My grandmother has been deafblind my entire life. It is incredibly frustrating to witness the lack of accomodation for deafblind individuals my entire life- my mother and I constantly have to take off work to assist my grandmother in simple tasks all because there is no co-navigator. Additionally it will improve my grandmother's livelihood, to not feel like a burden to family, to be able to carry out her errands as any other human can do. Deafblind individuals are human just like everyone else, they don't deserve the lack of accomodation and access they have been denied for centuries.

I hope that the passage of this Senate Bill (S 185) is actualized and becomes a reality. I look forward to a productive and equitable lives for deafblind Marylanders.

Thank you.

Samantha Brown



# **Support letter for CN BILL from AADB.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Shane Dundas

Position: FAV



Description: Full navy background  
Large letter AADB on the center of the image.  
A smaller size of AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
OF THE DEAFBLIND on the bottom of the large letter of AADB  
Two white stars and one red curvy stripe.

January 26, 2024

TO: Honorable Brian J. Feldman and Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan  
RE: S 185

Dear Chairman Feldman and Madam Vice Chairman Kagan:

We support this bill because we believe that deafblind Marylanders shall utilize their autonomy at its fullest, one of the ways they can do that is by having a co-navigator. That will help them come out of their homes and be organically part of the community at large as they have a lot to offer to the citizens of Maryland.

We hope that the passage of this Senate Bill (S 185) is actualized and becomes a reality. We look forward to a productive and equitable lives for deafblind Marylanders.

Thank you.  
The Team of AADB Board

# **Testimony SB 185 Steven Frank.pdf**

Uploaded by: Steven Frank

Position: FAV

To the Chair and Vice Chair of the Education, Environment, and Energy Committee and members of the Committee.

My name is Steven Frank. I live in Frederick, MD.

I am DeafBlind, and live with my sighted husband, Ed Knight.

I am here in support of SB 185; the Co-Navigation bill. This bill is important to me because I need rides and guide to attend appointments such as the doctor and dentist, grocery shopping and other shopping, and social events. (I can't communicate with a taxi driver or other driver who does not know ASL / tactile ASL, which is why I need a Co-Navigator, not simply a ride.)

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I ask for a favorable report on SB 185.

Steven Frank

**ODHHC o Navigation HB98 SB185 testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Usherla DeBerry

Position: FAV

**Wes Moore**  
*Governor*

**Usherla DeBerry**  
*Acting Director*

**Aruna Miller**  
*Lt. Governor*



**HB 98 DEAFBLIND CO-NAVIGATION SERVICES PROGRAM  
SB 185 DEAFBLIND CO-NAVIGATION SERVICES PROGRAM**

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE  
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

**HB 98 DEAFBLIND CO-NAVIGATION SERVICES PROGRAM  
SB 185 DEAFBLIND CO-NAVIGATION SERVICES PROGRAM**

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE  
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

**ACTING DIRECTOR USHERLA DEBERRY, Ed.S.**

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair  
Delegate Mark S. Chang, Vice-Chair  
January 30, 2024**

**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair  
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice-Chair  
January 30, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chair and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Usherla DeBerry. I have a long history providing Support Service Provider (SSP) services to the DeafBlind community. I am honored to be here on behalf of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) as its acting director to provide testimony to support the establishment of the Co-Navigation Services Program.

The proposed bill would create a Co-Navigation Service Program within ODHH for Deaf-Blind individuals in Maryland support for visual and environmental services to assist with communication and accessibility. The office will receive requests and coordinate services with a paired/or assigned Co-Navigator. Since the Co-Navigation Program is not under ODHH's purview and in order to establish it, additional resources including identifying grants and creating a position will be required.

This afternoon, in this room, you see several DeafBlind people here in person and some who are here through Zoom. They are here seeking equity. They have been told in our community 'I do not have time to assist' or 'This is time consuming.' Additionally, there is a mother of one DeafBlind witness who will also provide a witness testimony. DeafBlind lives do impact their loved ones and should not feel a burden.

This bill empowers DeafBlind to make choices for themselves based on tactile and environmental information they receive and be able to not only participate in society but also to contribute to the society as a whole. This is a serious, dire need of access for the DeafBlind Marylanders. The DeafBlind would be able to attend a workshop, exercise regularly such as hiking, shopping, make financial transactions, to their jobs, to travel, vote, keep medical appointments and many more that we all take granted on a daily basis. The DeafBlind will be able to contribute to the local economy while being provided sighted guides who communicate accessible information to empower the DeafBlind with choices.

Recently, I worked with a DeafBlind customer transporting them to a training course related to how to use a cane. During the appointment, it was important for me to share what was happening within the environment such as facial expressions, directions, sizes, actions, layout of room, what was on the tables such as notepads/foods/drinks, people and objects. The social cues were to the 'T' explaining personal feelings, reactions and prompts on his arm and back using haptics - my customer wanted to find his DeafBlind friend and that is how this all came about to connect them. A connection then a smile was 'felt.'

GODHH has been consistent in advocating for communication access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders and this includes the DeafBlind community. My predecessor, former director Kelby Brick, a strong advocate for our community, whose work resulted in Maryland's rank among the top states to provide American Sign Language interpreters on broadcast television during the pandemic. This is one example of the power of ending injustice embracing inclusion. It does not stop there. We shall continue the legacy of improving the lives of our DeafBlind community. After all, Governor Wes Moore has shared 'leave no one behind.'

Please support and pass this bill to increase DeafBlind's independence and to empower them to contribute to society.

Thank you.