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To: CHAIR OF EDUCATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE

SB0358 - Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library - Funding and Budget Submission

IN SUPPORT

My name is Kathleen MacMillan. I am writing today to urge you to enthusiastically support funding for Bill SB0358 – Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library: Funding and Budget Submission.

I am a lifelong Maryland resident. I am hearing, but have been involved with the Deaf Community since 1999. For the last 25 years, I have a been a counselor and director with Deaf Camps, Inc., a nonprofit organization that runs communication-rich camps for deaf and hard of hearing children, as well as children learning American Sign Language. I have been a nationally certified American Sign Language interpreter since 2006. I also hold a Master of Library Science from the University of Maryland, College Park, and worked in public and school libraries in Maryland, including the Maryland School for the Deaf, Columbia Campus, for 25 years. I am one of the few trainers in the nation who specializes in professional development for library staff focusing on better serving the Deaf Community, as well as the responsible use of American Sign Language in storytime programming. I maintain a detailed listing of resources for library staff nationwide on my website at KathyMacMillan.com, and I have taught 3 popular online courses on these topics with the American Library Association for many years. I am also the author of more than two dozen traditionally published books for children, teens, and adults, including the *Little Hands Signing* series from Familius Press, *Little Hands and Big Hands: Children and Adults Signing Together* (Hands Up Press), and *Try Your Hand at This!* (Scarecrow Press), a guide for library staff to better serve deaf patrons.

I was incredibly proud when Maryland became the first state to set up a Deaf Culture Digital Library, and I have seen firsthand how the Maryland DCDL has provided a model and an inspiration for other states to better serve their deaf patrons and to support library staff in doing so. As I travel around the state and its surrounding areas presenting storytimes that teach basic ASL, as well as professional development workshops, I have talked to many library staff members who have been able to better serve their D/deaf and hard of hearing patrons because of the resources provided by the DCDL, and to many D/deaf and hard of hearing people who have found access to resources through the DCDL for the first time.

The work of the DCDL is not just a nice thing; it is absolutely crucial for providing linguistic and cultural resources to this underserved population. Research shows that as many as 70% of D/deaf and hard of hearing children experience language deprivation due to a lack of accessible linguistic input, most prevalently among Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) families. Consequences of language deprivation include delays in cognitive and social-emotional development, limited educational development due to weak first-language skills that hinder learning written English as a second language, impacts on family relationships due to lack of communication, and lower self-esteem. (https://www.nad.org/implications-of-language-deprivation-for-young-deaf-deafblind-deafdisabled-and-hard-of-hearing-children/)

Even more alarming: the current administration has stated its desire to weaken both the Department of Justice and the Department of Education, both of which are critical to enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act. Weakening these entities may result in a de facto repeal of the ADA without any legislative decision. This would be devastating to the Deaf Community, as well as the disability community. It is more important than ever that the Maryland legislature shore up access and resources for these communities at the state level.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kathleen MacMillan