



BILL: SB 358 **DATE:** 2/5/2025
SUBJECT: Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library - Funding and Budget Submission **COMMITTEE:** Budget and Taxation
SPEAKER: Morgan Miller, State Librarian **POSITION:** Favorable

EXPLANATION

The Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) is in support of SB 358 and encourages a favorable review.

More than 1.2 million Maryland residents identify as being Deaf or hard-of-hearing, and this number is expected to increase as the population ages. The Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library (DCDL) serves the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community throughout Maryland and is the first of its kind. Usage of the DCDL has grown steadily in recent years as the library hosts one of the largest collections of books and resources related to Deaf Culture in the United States. This includes American Sign Language (ASL) materials, works by Deaf authors, resources from numerous Deaf, hard-of-hearing and allied organizations, and information about age-related hearing loss, among other resources.

The services and impact of the DCDL support many of the Moore-Miller Administration's priorities, including 1) Setting students up for success; 2) Creating an equitable, robust, and competitive economy; 3) Connecting Marylanders to jobs; and 4) Advancing infrastructure to better connect all Marylanders to opportunities and each other.

The DCDL website (<https://www.marylandcdl.org/>) is the core resource for the program. It functions as a digital library, resource center, and information hub and connector for other organizations and entities, including the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Maryland Association for the Deaf. The number of active website users has increased by 78% since 2022 and is estimated to grow to 21,000 over the course of the next year. Electronic materials (ebooks and audiobooks) totaled 1,203 in FY24, a 53% increase since FY22, and the demand for additional materials grows daily.

Public training and programming is another primary focus area. Since embarking on these efforts in 2020, the DCDL has grown to serve approximately 750 participants a year through its public programs. Programs focus on ASL instruction, technology and accessibility, author talks, and a

virtual Summer Reading and Learning program. These programs not only bring awareness to Deaf culture, they also directly serve the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Plans for increased resource and programming development, including the addition of more digital titles and an online catalog of Deaf digital creators and influencers, are underway but are limited due to funding constraints.

As part of DBM’s analysis of MSLA’s operating budget, the Agency was asked to comment on the need for additional funds, including an explanation of why the initial fiscal 2025 appropriation was insufficient, how the additional funds will be used, and whether this reflects ongoing funding needs for the program.

Since the Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library’s inception in FY 2015, MSLA has allocated \$235,000 in general funds to support personnel and other resources. This funding level initially was adequate to support the DCDL. However, due to the requirements for specialized personnel and planned increases in staff salaries that are tied to the union contract that staff have with host Montgomery County, DCDL expenses exceed the current budget allocation. Furthermore, funds needed to support the DCDL’s increasing resource usage, expanded services and programming demands are extremely limited. Projected funding needs for the program for FY2023-27 are as follows:

	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026 (Projected)	FY 2027 (Projected)
Salaries/Benefits	148,015	246,178	270,797	297,877	327,665
Contracted Services	42,765	35,186	46,022	48,669	54,154
Supplies	23,522	15,000	15,000	18,000	20,000
Other (indirect costs)	20,698	29,636	33,181	36,454	40,181
Percent increase from previous year	XXX	38.7%	11.9%	10%	10%

TOTAL	235,000	326,000	365,000	401,000	442,000
--------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------	----------------

If fully supported through a reliable funding source, the DCDL will be able to: Continue to enhance its digital platform by offering additional resources and titles; Better provide resources to school-age children, including access interpretation services and building virtual and in-person networks for Deaf and hard-of-hearing children to improve their social-emotional well-being; Increase public programming and partnerships; Support workforce development by working with partners to expand services to connect members of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community to job opportunities, networking events, job training, and entrepreneurship to close the employment gap; participate in regional and statewide workgroups to ensure that issues for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals are prioritized.

Without additional funding, library services to members of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community will suffer, from limited resource availability to reduced personnel. In order to cover DCDL funding gaps and maintain a basic level of services, MSLA may be forced to reallocate funds from other programs (primarily grants to county public library systems), limiting the effectiveness of the agency throughout the state. We appreciate your thoughtful consideration.

MSLA supports the passage of this bill.