



**Maryland Association of the Deaf  
Written Testimony**

**HB 158 – Department of Aging - Social Connections Program - Establishment  
Thursday, January 23, 2025  
Position: Favorable with Amendment**

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The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is writing to express our strong support for HB 158, with the proposed amendment. We commend the legislature's efforts to incorporate accessibility language into the law, ensuring that all Marylanders, including those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have communication disabilities, have equal access to telecommunications services.

Currently, the Senior Call Check program poses significant accessibility challenges for the deaf and hard of hearing community. It is deeply ironic that this program draws from the Universal Service Trust Fund (USTF), which was specifically established to address telecommunications accessibility needs and provide equal telephone access for individuals who cannot use standard telephones. Instead of fulfilling its intended purpose, the program operates in a manner that excludes a significant portion of the population it aims to serve.

MDAD applauds the amendment to HB 158 that removes the arbitrary 0.05 cap solely applied to the Senior Call Check program. This cap is inconsistent with other USTF-funded programs, which do not face similar restrictions. Eliminating this cap is a crucial step toward ensuring that the Senior Call Check program can adequately serve all eligible Marylanders without compromising the financial stability of other vital services funded by the USTF, such as Maryland Relay, which is essential for maintaining Maryland's compliance with Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Furthermore, we are encouraged by the revisions to Social Connections. Continued collaboration among the Maryland Department of Aging, the Department of Disabilities, and the Telecommunications Access of Maryland Program (TAM) is vital for the success of these initiatives. MDAD looks forward to supporting these collaborative efforts to create a more inclusive and accessible Maryland.

In conclusion, MDAD strongly endorses HB 158 with the proposed amendments. These changes are essential for ensuring that all programs under the USTF fulfill their mission of providing equal telecommunications access to all Marylanders, particularly those who are deaf and hard of hearing. We appreciate the legislature's commitment to accessibility and look forward to continued progress in this area.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Tina Joyner