



Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony
HB 439 – Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and
Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Renaming
Tuesday, February 17, 2026
Position: Favorable

President

Tina Joyner

The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the interests of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders in matters of accessibility, civil rights, and equity. There are approximately 1.2 million Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals living in the State of Maryland.

Vice President

Jacob Leffler

We write to express our strong support for HB 439, sponsored by Delegate Kaufman, regarding the renaming of the Governor’s Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Secretary

Payal Sweet

HB 439 renames the Governor’s Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing to explicitly include DeafBlind individuals. While the bill’s changes may appear technical, their impact is substantial and long overdue. By formally recognizing the DeafBlind community in statute, the State of Maryland affirms its commitment to full inclusion, equity, and accurate representation of the communities these entities are charged with serving.

Treasurer

Smita Kothari

DeafBlind individuals face unique and complex barriers related to communication access, mobility, employment, healthcare, emergency preparedness, and civic participation. Their experiences and needs are distinct from, though connected to, those of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. Explicit inclusion in the names of the Office and Advisory Council ensures that DeafBlind Marylanders are not overlooked in policy development, service planning, and state decision-making processes. Names matter. Statutory recognition matters. When communities are explicitly named, government accountability and visibility follow.

Board Members

Meredith DeSomma

Vikki Porter

Theo Conley

Kitty Fogarty

Bill Millios

Thelma Schroeder

Importantly, HB 439 does not impose new mandates or fiscal burdens on the State. Instead, it modernizes and strengthens statutory language to reflect best practices in accessibility and the evolving understanding of the diverse populations within Maryland’s Deaf community. This legislation brings Maryland law into alignment with principles of equity and inclusive governance.

The Maryland Association of the Deaf strongly believes that inclusive statutory language promotes transparency, responsibility, and equitable access to state resources and services. HB 439 is a meaningful step toward ensuring that DeafBlind Marylanders are fully recognized and represented within Maryland’s governmental framework.

We respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 439.

Sincerely,

MDAD Board of Directors