



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Sponsor Testimony**

**Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Case Management Services HB0866**

**Delegate Aaron Kaufman**

**02/24 at 1:00 p.m. 2026**

Good afternoon Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the committee. I am Delegate Aaron Kaufman, representing District 18 in Montgomery County, and I am here today to respectfully request a favorable report on bill HB866 - Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Case Management Services. This bill strengthens statewide support for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Marylanders by authorizing the Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide specialized case-management services. Based on the amendments developed in collaboration with the Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Office can implement this legislation using existing resources.

This legislation reflects the formal recommendation of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Workgroup. After months of stakeholder meetings, interagency consultation, and data review, the Workgroup identified the lack of direct and specialized case-management services as a core statewide gap. On page 33 of its report, the Workgroup specifically recommends that the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing incorporate case-management



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services, citing ODHH's existing infrastructure, statewide recognition, and ongoing community demand as key reasons to move forward with this approach.

In Maryland, roughly 1.2 million residents are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, indicating substantial and diverse populations with sensory disabilities.<sup>3</sup> DeafBlind residents represent individuals with combined vision and hearing loss represent an important part of Maryland's community and often benefit from coordinated, communication-accessible support when navigating public systems. Many rely on individualized support that general state agencies are not equipped to provide. Although GODHH is the state's central office for these communities, the office's latest fiscal report data shows that it lacks the statutory authority and trained staff to offer case-management services which is greatly needed<sup>1</sup>. According to the World Report on Disability from the World Health Organization (WHO), people with disabilities who require multiple services often receive uncoordinated or duplicative services.<sup>2</sup> Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals may also encounter transitional difficulties when care is transferred from one service provider to another.<sup>2</sup> As a result,

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2022 (2022), <https://odhh.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2023/01/GODHH-Annual-Report-FY22.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, World Report on Disability (2011), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564182>

<sup>3</sup> Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Open Data Portal – Deaf and Hard of Hearing Population Data (last visited Feb. 19, 2026), <https://opendata.maryland.gov/stories/s/ODHH/edcn-a22p/>



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residents can experience disconnected referrals, inconsistent access to services, and delays in receiving essential support that undermine both equity and access.

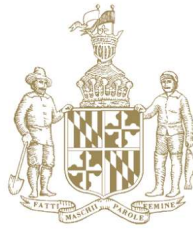
This legislation expands the Office's mission to include direct case management and creates a dedicated PIN for trained personnel. By doing so, the bill ensures that Marylanders receive guidance from professionals with the communication skills and cultural competency required to navigate complex systems. These changes allow the Office to fulfill the role that residents already expect the Office to play, while improving efficiency and cutting down on potential confusion for Marylanders in need of the services across state programs.

This proposal also aligns with national trends. Massachusetts provides statewide case management through its Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Washington State's ODHH operates a comprehensive, cross-system case-management program that supports Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing residents in accessing public services. Adopting the framework in this bill brings Maryland in line with states that have already recognized the need for centralized, culturally competent navigation services.

Passage of this bill will provide people who are deaf, deafblind and heard of hearing the support they need to flourish and create a more inclusive society. For these reasons, I

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respectfully request a favorable report on HB866 - Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Case Management Services. Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to take any questions.