

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 1084

(Senator M. Washington)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Health and Government Operations

Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing - Established

This bill establishes the Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing to study and make recommendations regarding services, programs, advocacy, outreach, and other efforts to improve the quality of life of individuals who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing. The Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) must staff the workgroup. Workgroup members may not receive compensation but are eligible for reimbursement under standard State travel regulations. By June 1, 2025, the workgroup must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2024, and terminates June 30, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: ODHH general fund expenditures increase by \$67,100 in FY 2025 only to support the workgroup, as discussed below. The FY 2025 budget includes \$10,000 in general funds for interpretation services to support the workgroup, contingent on enactment of House Bill 1069 or Senate Bill 1084 of 2024. Revenues are not affected.

| (in dollars) | FY 2025 | FY 2026 | FY 2027 | FY 2028 | FY 2029 |
|----------------|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Revenues | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| GF Expenditure | 67,100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net Effect | (\$67,100) | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: The bill does not materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The workgroup must study, assess, and make recommendations regarding:

- providing direct and specialized case management services for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- the development and administration of programs that support educational, employment, health, and social opportunities for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- advocacy for policies, programs, and legislative initiatives that address the needs of and issues affecting deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- outreach efforts to raise public awareness and foster understanding of the challenges encountered by deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- coordination with State agencies and utilization of State resources to provide specialized case management services to meet the needs of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- identification of barriers and gaps in communication access and development of solutions to improve the quality of life of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals; and
- development of activities to enhance civic engagement between deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals and the community.

As necessary, the workgroup must establish subcommittees and assign members to assist in the research and preparation of the workgroup's report.

Current Law:

Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

ODHH was established in 2001 to promote the general welfare of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the State. ODHH must fulfill the following duties and responsibilities:

- provide, advocate, and coordinate the adoption of public policies, regulations, and programs that will benefit deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- improve access to communication and to existing services and programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- provide direct services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, as appropriate;
- increase public awareness of the needs and issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- work with State and local agencies to ensure access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to safety and emergency services;
- develop a referral service for deaf and hard of hearing individuals;

- serve as an information clearinghouse on the needs and issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- increase access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to educational, health, and social opportunities;
- work with private organizations, the federal government, and other units of State government to promote economic development for deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- work to eliminate the underemployment and unemployment of deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- provide a network through which services provided by State and federal programs serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals can be channeled; and
- promote compliance with State, local, and federal laws and policies protecting and serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Each year, the Director of ODHH must submit a report to the Governor and the General Assembly on (1) the activities of the office; (2) the status of programs and services facilitated by the office; (3) the activities of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, as specified; (4) statistics on compliance with State and federal laws related to deaf and hard of hearing individuals; and (5) recommendations for improved delivery of services for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Within ODHH, there is the Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The council, which meets at least quarterly, advises ODHH on carrying out its duties and reviews statewide activities that involve deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The council also fosters coordination and support of programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals and studies ways to ensure that services and facilities are available to deaf and hard of hearing State residents.

State Expenditures: ODHH advises that additional resources are required to support the workgroup, including a part-time graduate assistant (at 10 hours per week) to staff the workgroup, consultant services (for outreach, program development, data gathering and visualization, research, and development of recommendations), and interpreter services for meetings. Thus, ODHH general fund expenditures increase by an estimated \$67,123 in fiscal 2025.

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| Graduate Assistant | \$7,123 |
| Consultant Services | 50,000 |
| Interpreter Services | <u>10,000</u> |
| Total ODHH FY 2025 Expenditures | \$67,123 |

This estimate reflects a 30-day start up delay from the bill's July 1, 2024 effective date and assumes that costs for the graduate assistant end May 31, 2025, as the workgroup's report is due by June 1, 2025. The estimate does not reflect any expense reimbursements for the workgroup's 13 members. Should submission of the report be delayed, general fund expenditures increase. The workgroup terminates June 30, 2026.

The fiscal 2025 budget includes a general fund appropriation of approximately \$1.05 million for ODHH. Contingent on enactment of House Bill 1069 or Senate Bill 1084 of 2024, the fiscal 2025 budget adds \$10,000 to the ODHH appropriation for interpretation services necessary to support the workgroup. Funds not expended for this added purpose may not be transferred by budget amendment or otherwise to any other purpose and must revert to the general fund. This estimate reflects the full \$10,000 in general funds for interpretation services provided in the fiscal 2025 budget as the bill satisfies the contingency. However, this actual cost for these services depends on the number of workgroup meetings held. As noted above, any unspent funds from this contingent appropriation revert to the general fund.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 1069 (Delegate Kaufman, *et al.*) - Health and Government Operations.

Information Source(s): Department of Budget and Management; Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 3, 2024
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