

HB 1523

Good morning/afternoon all -

My name is Nat Balsley and I'm Deaf, so is my wife and our three kids. We all reside in Frederick, Maryland. I've been acting as a liaison between the large deaf community in Frederick County and the sole movie theater in the area, Regal Cinemas for the last few years. I've taken on this role due to the general frustration from both the general management at the theater in fielding multiple requests for multiple dates/times and the Deaf community in not getting their needs met. I was lucky enough to work with a very cooperative group of management at the Frederick Regal, and unfortunately I cannot say the same for the majority of the theaters in other cities.

I've attended numerous open captioned screenings and have noticed the majority of the audiences do not rely on the captioning (they're hearing), but do not object to having captions on screen. With this being said - I am fully advocating this bill to ensure that every movie theater in Maryland is providing equal access to the deaf community throughout the state with open captions. We should not rely on folks like me to ensure equality for the surrounding community of each movie theater to ensure our needs are met. I would however like to emphasize the importance of screening open captioned movies at appropriate times to ensure the majority of the attendees benefiting the open captions are able to attend (I.E. 1 PM on a weekday and/or 9 PM on a weekday/Sunday). This would mean putting open captioned showings that aren't too early in the day on a weekday or late enough in the evenings that the average attendee would consider too late. My role as a liaison has occasionally required my input to moderate the times established by the theater to better meet the needs of the community. So it's my hope that once this bill has been passed - that the showtimes are set at or closely set at peak showtimes to ensure equal and reasonable access.

I'm available to answer any further questions if need be.

Thank you!