

Favorable Report for HB 612.pdf

Uploaded by: Jane Bellmyer

Position: FAV

March 30, 2022

To the members of the Maryland General Assembly
Regarding HB 612
From Jane Bellmyer, resident of Rising Sun Maryland
Hearing impaired

I respectfully ask you to vote in favor of House Bill 612, which would seek to modernize and update the Maryland Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

We live in an era where information – true or otherwise – is available everywhere. The days of dusty encyclopedias on shelves is gone. However one agency in Maryland needs to catch up. The Governor's Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing does not have the latest and best information to help those of us struggling to hear better, or at all. My last conversation with the agency told me that insurance in Maryland helps with the purchase of hearing aids. No it does not. Maryland law only requires insurance coverage for those 19 and under. A few of the Maryland Health Care Exchange policies have coverage but what about the rest of us on policies outside of the subsidized service?

In that call to ODHH I discovered the agency did not know how many Maryland residents classify themselves as deaf or hard of hearing. An internet search of that information indicates that information has not been updated since 2016.

<https://odhh.maryland.gov/press-releases/featured-story/over-1-2-million-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-marylanders/>

The responsibilities of the agency, as stated by its own website, is not being followed.

“The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was established in October 2001 through legislation (Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly). In accordance with the State Government Article, section 9-2407 of the Annotated Code of Maryland, the office promotes the general welfare of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Maryland by addressing policy gaps, providing expertise related to Deaf and hard of hearing issues, and facilitating the ability to access resources and services.”

All ODHH appears to do is refer people to a laundry list of other services, none of which are in house or connected to the state. I was not even referred to the Division of Rehabilitative Services.

When I contacted the agency a year ago to seek their support of HB 910 (a failed bill seeking insurance coverage for the purchase of hearing aids) I was told they knew nothing about it. I was told they serve the governor and his wishes.

As a taxpayer, a voter and a hearing impaired Maryland resident I expect the agencies in this state to be experts AND advocates. There needs to be a shake up in ODHH and I urge you to support HB 612 to make this happen.

Jane M Bellmyer
303 Sunrise Circle
Rising Sun MD 21911

FAVORABLE REPORT HB 612.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephen Puopolo

Position: FAV

March 30th, 2022

The Honorable Paul Pinsky, Chairman

The Honorable Cheryl Kagan, Vice Chairman

Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

**RE: Requesting FAVORABLE REPORT: HB 612 – Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing -
Responsibilities and Reporting**

Dear Chairman Pinsky; Vice-Chairman Kagan and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee:

My name is Stephen Puopolo, a constituent of Harford County, and I am urging you to pass House Bill 612 that would require the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to maintain an estimate of the number of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals in the State of Maryland. I have seen firsthand the lack of resources that has been challenging for the DHH community, as well as the Disability Community. The Disability Community has often been an afterthought when it comes to gaining assistance and the DHH Community is no different.

As someone who has been Hard of Hearing since birth, I was lucky to receive medical assistance of Maryland as a child as it provided me with hearing aids. What people may not realize is how expensive hearing aids can become. Throughout my adult life I often could only afford underpowered hearing aids. Recently I was able to get an upgrade that costed at least \$5,000 before considering ear molds that costs extra. My insurance only covered a small portion of the cost and even with help from Department of Rehabilitation Services, I still managed to take out a loan to help cover the remaining cost. I was lucky to have been able to the upgrade while it was not an emergency. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the DHH Community if someone's hearing aid were to malfunction, that person might not be able to afford a replacement.

By keeping track of the DHH population and providing better access to equal and affordable access to hearing aids, the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will be doing a much-needed service to the DHH Community.

Thank you for your time,

Stephen Puopolo, Harford County

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Uploaded by: Michele Westfall

Position: UNF

HB612
Unfavorable

Senator Pinsky & Senator Kagan
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 29, 2022

Dear Senators Pinsky and Kagan,

My name is Michele Westfall, and I'm the chair of the Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Council. I am submitting my written testimony on HB612, and my position on this bill is unfavorable.

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) currently already provides the proposed items to the deaf and hard of hearing citizens in Maryland (and has done so for years), and this bill is a waste of this Senate committee's time.

However, if you need more reasons to vote against this bill, be aware that in addition to the excellent work done by GODHH, there are also additional systems already in place to assist underinsured individuals with getting affordable access to hearing aids through audiologists, deaf-related organizations, Maryland School for the Deaf, and other public schools with deaf and hard of hearing students in Maryland. Most importantly, Maryland Medicaid covers the cost of hearing aids for both deaf and hard of hearing children and adults.

Also, the Federal Census does not ask people to provide information on whether they are deaf or hard of hearing on their census, and because of that, there are no data on exact number of deaf and hard of hearing people in any state in this country. However, GODHH does provide numerical data in their annual reports, such as the number of calls it receives from Maryland deaf and hard of hearing citizens, the number of requests it receives, and so forth. These numbers provide a more accurate picture of the needs of Maryland's deaf and hard of hearing citizenry than using general estimates from the federal census.

Lastly...and this is most important: no one in Maryland's Deaf and Hard of Hearing community was consulted at any time about this bill, including myself, so this bill is not inclusive and does not represent us. We currently have other community-based bills in the Maryland legislative pipeline which should be passed right now, such as SB748/HB1107 and HB1238, for example.

I urge you to vote against HB612, but if you decide not to, please be sure to take steps to add more funding for additional staff for GODHH. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Michele Westfall
17 Steiner Way, Apt 101, Frederick, MD 21701
240-575-2069