

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.

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