

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