

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
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