



**HB 1238 – Places of Accommodation – Motion Picture Houses – Captioning
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

April 5, 2022

Position: Unfavorable

Dear Chairman Smith, Jr., Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in opposition to HB 1238 - Motion Picture Houses - Captioning.

My name is Thomas Wienholt, and I am the Vice President of Horizon Cinemas. We are a small family-owned movie theatre company with 5 locations in MD. Each of our locations has 8 or less screens. Since we have limited screens at each location, I am concerned this bill will financially hurt our company. We are just starting to recover from the pandemic after forced closures in 2020 and 2021, and attendance is still about 50% below pre-pandemic levels. Forcing us to program multiple open caption shows will create another challenge to overcome in our efforts to stay in business.

Currently, we are accommodating the needs of our hearing-impaired customers in a number of ways. As required by law, we provide headsets and/or open caption devices (which mount on the seats) upon request. In addition, we allow customers to request on-screen open captions via our website: <https://horizoncinemas.com/about--contact>

On average, we only receive one or two on-screen open caption requests per week, for all our locations combined. We promptly respond to these requests, program the open caption show as close to the requested time as possible, and update the website so that the showtime is labeled "w/Open Captions." Typically, ticket sales for these shows are very low since most of our customers do not want/need the captions. In fact, we have received negative feedback and demands for refunds from customers who were unhappy the screening was open-captioned, even though it was clearly labeled that way on the website and theatre signage.

Our current system has worked well for our customers and in fact, we were recognized by Anne Arundel County a few years ago for our efforts to provide on-screen open captions to our customers.

As written, the bill would require at least two open captioned shows per film each week, after the first week. This one-size-fits-all mandate would not take into consideration the availability of our customers to attend these shows, so we would still have to offer open captions on demand.

Please continue to give us the flexibility to respond to our guest requests and market demands, rather than a one-size-fits-all legislated mandate that will impede our recovery from the pandemic.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas Wienholt", written over a white background.

Thomas Wienholt - VP