

My name is Kirsten Poston, I am the President of the Maryland Association of the Deaf. The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization that protects the interests of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders concerning accessibility and equality issues. We are advocating for the passage of House Bill #264 sponsored by Delegate Harry Bhandari, Delegate Andre V. Johnson, Jr., and Delegate Steve Johnson regarding movie theater captioning. There are approximately 1.2 million Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals living in the State of Maryland.

The current closed captioning (CC) technology and equipment in the State of Maryland movie theaters could be more convenient and convenient to use. When equipment malfunctions, it is a hassle to leave the movie to return to the theater lobby for a hopefully not-also-broken replacement and deal with slow-to-respond staff. More often than not, that results in missing some or most of the movies that consumers pay to see. Even when the equipment works, it is a headache for consumers to deal with constantly moving their heads up and down from the captioning device nested in the cupholder to the movie screen. Or those bulky captioning glasses with multiple wires that are heavy on the nose, and that's double the weight for consumers who already wear prescription glasses. These broken devices, it is a potential violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Open Captioning (OC) (on the screen) is a far better avenue suited for movie enjoyment. Not only is open captioning less prone to failure, but this access enables the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind to maintain their dignity by being able to blend in with the rest of the moviegoers. As a bonus, open captions benefit a wider segment of the public, including children, seniors, those who lost hearing later in life, and those learning English as a second language. This is the conception of equal access for all. All of us go to the theater and feel equal to others and enjoy the movie.

Hawaii is the first, and so far, the only state that implemented this law since 2019. MDAD contacted a state association in Hawaii, which indicated that the financial impact for the movie theaters has NO negative impacts. If the cash flow was negative, these movie theater operators would have already been championing removing the law by now. More recently, in December of 2021, NYC passed a similar law. I would like to remind you all that NATO stated during last year's hearing that it does not cost a penny to turn the open captioning on the screen. Now is the time for Maryland to lead the national effort in equal access for all in the movie theaters.

We look forward to a favorable report on HB 264.