

Thank you Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and the Committee for the opportunity to allow us explain why this equal access bill is SO important. You will hear examples of how and why captioning benefits ALL of us- not just the Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens of the State of Maryland.

Having open captioning on the screen means everyone can enjoy the movie together with no separate devices needed for access. Currently, patrons need to continually adjust either the cupholder device or the very bulky glasses--even if they wear prescription glasses. Oftentimes, the equipment malfunctions frequently and the patron has to go to the theater lobby to get it replaced and pray that the replacement isn't broken either. That means missing a good portion of the movie, and it's no fun to hear your (hearing) companions talk about certain scenes you missed because of no access or having to take care of the broken equipment. I also don't need to add these are potential violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) because of ineffective communication access with broken devices. Open captioning will reduce all of these issues and motivate consumers to patronize the movie theaters even more.

Captioning also benefits veterans and those later in life who lost their hearing. Captioning helps people who come to the US and Maryland to learn English. Captioning is also a useful tool for adults and children who are learning how to read and write. For hearing people dealing with background noises and inaudible dialogues, captioning is a lifesaver in catching up with the dialogue. 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.

The National Association of Theater Owners said that movie theaters already are providing open captioning movies at theaters. It is great that movie theaters are doing it on a voluntary basis however, we need this bill to pass because we have seen that some theaters decide to decrease the number of movie theaters and not all locations provide it. Some people have to drive an hour or more just to watch a movie while there is a theater nearby. Voluntary basis also means that movie theaters can decide to provide open captioning movies during the week or not. With this bill, it will guarantee that there will be open captioning movies every week. Not having an open captioning movie every week does not give equal access.

I would love to see Maryland taking the lead in this national effort and pass the bill. There will be waves of new people buying movie theater tickets in Maryland. Gallaudet University is in the backyard, and folks from there will come to Maryland to enjoy watching movies. Let's make Maryland a great example of being a wonderful state for everyone and vote in favor of this bill!

Thank you for your continued support on this equal access bill!