

HB451

Unfavorable

Delegate Clippinger

Judiciary Committee

Room 101, House Office Building

Annapolis, MD 21401

February 6, 2023

Dear Delegate Clippinger,

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 (MACDHH). MACDHH advises the Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing on matters and issues affecting the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities.

My position on this bill is unfavorable. For quite some time, MACDHH has been concerned about the impact of the Ignition Interlock Program on Deaf and Hard of Hearing drivers, mainly because of the poorly designed and inaccessible nature of these devices. The device has a tiny light notification built in and is usually placed around the right side of the driver (usually in the cupholder of the driver's armrest). The driver is notified to breathe into the device before starting the vehicle. Then, during the active operation of the vehicle, the driver is prompted at certain intervals via an auditory signal to breathe in the device to check the driver's alcohol levels. If the driver misses the auditory signal, there are consequences such as locking the car to prevent the driver from driving any further, charging the driver with rolling retest violations which extends their participation in the program, additional fines, and at worst, penalizing the driver with suspension or revocation of their driver's license.

MACDHH has invited representatives from the Maryland Department of Transportation and one of the listed vendors (Lifesafar) to our advisory board meetings twice (last spring and in December 2022) to discuss our concerns about the poor accessibility of the device. While there has been progress in terms of MDOT/MVA updating its best practices guidelines for vendors; increasing the requirement that all vendors make their device accessible (previously it was five vendors); adding closed captions to their training videos for drivers, and adding verbiage on the visual aid devices that a test is required, it still is not enough, because our main concern still has not been addressed.

The physical device itself remains inaccessible to drivers who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and/or have hearing impairments. We recommended to MDOT/MVA the following improvements:

- Redesign the placement of and the size of the visual blinking light on the device

- Customer service/contact methods should also include text capability
- Hire Deaf and Hard of Hearing staff to assist Deaf and Hard of Hearing drivers enrolled in the Ignition Interlock Program

We stress that it is vitally important to include Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in the redesign of the device, as no one from MDOT has consulted with MACDHH, GODHH, any Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and non-profit citizen organizations such as Maryland Association of the Deaf. To date, these improvements have not been implemented, and it is for these reasons we oppose this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Michele Westfall

Chair, Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Board

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