



Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony
HB 1069 – Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing
Friday, March 8, 2024

President

Tina Joyner

As you may be aware, there are approximately 1.2 million Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (D/DB/HH) individuals living in the State of Maryland. The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization that protects and promotes the interests of accessibility, equity, and quality of life for those D/DB/HH Marylanders.

Vice President

Jacob Leffler

While commissions in other states are able to recognize service gaps and provide direct case management for these communities, the same cannot be said of Maryland. Currently, there is no centralized place that provides case management services statewide while identifying, understanding, and supporting the needs of D/DB/HH communities. MDAD has heard stories too numerous to count of Marylanders seeking services only to encounter a patchwork of resources and/or agencies that do not sufficiently address their issues. Many of these individuals fall through the cracks.

Secretary

Tiasha Bera

Treasurer

Allysa Dittmar

To that end, MDAD believes that the establishment of the Commission on Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing would be a good step in the right direction concerning the above-mentioned issues impacting the D/DB/HH communities. The passage of this bill—SB 1069, sponsored by Senator Kaufmann—would empower the Commission to operate as an independent organization of the State of Maryland to provide and advocate for accessible and comprehensive services, improve equitable opportunities, and encourage inclusivity for D/DB/HH constituents in Maryland.

Board Members

Vikki Porter

Jennifer Ajifowoke

Blaise Delahoussaye

Tori Reeves

Thelma Schroeder

The bill would allow the Commission to establish programs that are very much needed in the State of Maryland to improve delivery of services and enhance the quality of life for D/DB/HH communities. MDAD continues to respect and support the work of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH). As a matter of fact, MDAD was involved in the push for the establishment of GODHH over 20 years ago. While establishing GODHH has been proven fruitful, there are limitations to the office due to its very nature of aligning with the current governor's preferences and priorities on issues impacting the D/DB/HH communities. The Commission would independently be able to initiate and advocate for legislation and perform community-based work.

The Commission is not intended to replace GODHH, but rather, fill in advocacy and services gaps that GODHH is not statutorily responsible for. We believe that having both entities would help strengthen the D/DB/HH communities.

MDAD looks forward to favorable with amendments on HB 1069.

Thank you,

MDAD Board of Directors