

To: Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair

House Appropriations Committee

Bill: HB0678 – Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library: Funding and Budget Submission

Friday, February 21, 2025

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My name is Keith Delk, and I am testifying in strong support of HB0678, which seeks to increase funding for the Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library (DCDL). I am a program specialist at the DCDL, an accessibility advocate, and a member of the Deaf community. Throughout my career, I have worked to ensure that digital spaces, educational resources, and information are accessible and inclusive.

For many in the Deaf community, the DCDL is a hub for accessible materials and cultural preservation. Through its extensive collection of eBooks, ASL resources, educational programming, and library and community events, the DCDL has created opportunities for lifelong learning, capacity building, and meaningful engagement. I have personally witnessed DCDL's impact through its dedication to supporting Deaf authors, promoting literacy initiatives like sign language storytime, providing bilingual ASL-English materials, and ensuring that programs, events, and learning resources are accessible in formats that serve our diverse community. Whether it's a Deaf child discovering stories in their native language for the first time, a librarian greeting a Deaf patron in their native

language, an ASL student gaining deeper understanding of Deaf culture, or an educator finding essential teaching materials, the DCDL provides equitable access to knowledge that would otherwise be out of reach.

However, as the demand for bilingual digital materials continues to rise to support language acquisition and Deaf education, the need for increased funding is critical. Additional resources will allow the DCDL to expand its eBook collection, enhance its digital offerings, and develop new initiatives that bridge information gaps for Deaf and hard-of-hearing Marylanders. Without this funding, these essential services risk being limited, leaving many without the resources they need for education, literacy, and personal growth.

I urge you to support HB0678 and the continued funding of the Deaf Culture Digital Library. By investing in the DCDL, you are affirming the right of Deaf individuals to access knowledge in their language and culture, fostering inclusion, and ensuring that future generations can continue to learn and connect.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Keith Delk