



HOWARD COUNTY
LIBRARY SYSTEM

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**Testimony in support of HB 678: Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library - Funding
Hearing before the House Appropriations Committee
February 19, 2025
Submitted by Tonya Aikens, Howard County Library System President & CEO**

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express support for **HB 678: Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library - Funding**.

The Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library (DCDL) is a unique and invaluable resource for the 1.2 million Maryland residents who identify as Deaf or hard-of-hearing. The DCDL provides leadership and guidance in offering resources about Deaf culture; acquiring and preserving a collection of Deaf resources in digital formats; providing access to information regardless of location; providing highly competent assistance to Maryland residents and library staff in local public library systems, academic librarians in colleges and universities, and other libraries throughout Maryland.

State law requires the Maryland State Library Agency (MSLA) to fund a DCDL coordinator, maintain a website, purchase and provide resources, deliver staff training, offer programs, and establish both an Advisory Board and a Friends organization.

Since the DCDL's inception in FY15, MSLA has allocated \$235,000 in general funds to support DCDL personnel and other resources. For FY25, DCDL costs are expected to be \$365,000, representing a \$131,000 shortage. By FY27, the program's funding needs are projected to be \$442,000. The proposed annual funding bill is for \$450,000.

The DCDL website, the core resource for the program, functions as a digital library, resource center, information hub and connector for other organizations and entities. The number of active DCDL website users and electronic materials available to customers have increased steadily in recent years, with website usage and demand for materials projected to grow in the years to come.

Since embarking on public training and programming efforts in 2020, the DCDL has significantly grown its public programs, including American Sign Language (ASL) instruction, technology and accessibility, author talks, and a virtual Summer Reading and Learning program.

Without additional funding, services to Maryland's Deaf and hard-of-hearing community will suffer, whether through reductions in DCDL programs, staffing levels, planned website enhancements, its digital collection, or training for Maryland public library staff to adequately serve this population.

In order to cover DCDL funding gaps and maintain a basic level of services moving forward, MSLA may be forced to reallocate funds from other programs, limiting the effectiveness of the agency throughout the state.

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Thank you for your support of Maryland's Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. We ask that you **favorably recommend HB 678** for passage.

Sincerely,

Tonya Aikens,
President & CEO