

March 28, 2025

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Baltimore City Mayor's Commission on Disabilities

RE: **House Bill 1363 – Places of Public Accommodation – Captioning Motion Pictures Houses – Alterations**

Hearing Date: Tuesday, April 1, 2025

POSITION: Support

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Mayor's Commission on Disabilities **supports House Bill 1363 – Places of Public Accommodation – Motion Pictures Houses – Captioning.**

The reason for this bill is simple – without it, no cinema in Baltimore City would have to offer any open-captioning screenings. Open-captioning means that Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons can read the dialogue on the big screen rather than use small captioning devices which, of course, interfere with the main reason why people still go to the cinema. This bill makes Baltimore City theaters more accessible and inclusive.

Last session, we were delighted that the General Assembly enacted HB 426/SB 92, which requires certain motion picture houses to provide at least two open-caption movie screenings per week for the first three weeks of a movie premier. The motion picture house can select which two screenings to suit its business purposes. During the legislative process, the bill was amended so that it only applies to a motion picture house with at least eight screens. This means that only the very largest motion picture houses are subject to this requirement and in Baltimore City the most popular and well-attended locations are exempt. This bill would simply reduce from eight screens to four screens those motion picture houses affected.

We respectfully believe that this will better serve the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, including many of our seniors, so that they too can fully enjoy the big screen experience. Over time, we anticipate that two open-captioning screenings per week will draw viewers who would otherwise stay home to watch a movie. It is our hope that this would both increase business and serve the cause of better accessibility.

This bill would alter the number of screens in a motion picture house above which the motion picture house is required to provide open movie captioning; requiring that each motion picture house that is a place of public accommodation report to the Commission on Civil Rights and the Attorney General on the number of screenings each month in which certain captions were used; and generally relating to movie captioning in motion picture houses.

At present, under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"), motion picture houses are required to provide closed captioning access for Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, which

means small individual devices so that each person can read the dialogue as the movie plays on the big screen. But, as you can imagine, this is an awkward way to experience a film that was intended to be enjoyed on the big screen as one seamless experience.

The proposed requirement for open captioning for two screenings per week would mean that the dialogue would be displayed on the big screen. While there is some resistance to this for fear of an adverse financial impact, our investigation suggests that such screenings, particularly if offered at the more attractive times, would actually increase the overall audience because it would also be more accessible to seniors and persons for whom English is a second language. Having the dialogue on the big screen enhances the movie-going experience for a variety of individuals.

We therefore respectfully request a **favorable** report on House Bill 1363