

Thank you, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and the Committee, for the opportunity to explain why this bill is critically important for passage in the House. First, I want to express my gratitude for your past support and efforts in passing the previous version of the bill, which was signed by the Governor last year. And now, it's a pleasure to see you all again to discuss this important issue, which will ensure more movie theaters are more accessible across the State of Maryland.

Currently, the law mandates that movie theaters with 8 or more screens provide open-captioned movies twice a week for the first three weeks after a film's release. However, this applies to only 39 theaters statewide, leaving 15 theaters exempt from providing open-captioned movies. Our goal is to ensure that all movie theaters are accessible, so people don't have to drive up to an hour/50 miles just to see a movie with open captions.

Under the current law, these counties that only have theaters with 7 or fewer screens in most cases are not required to provide open-captioned movies in the following counties:

- Allegheny County
- Baltimore City
- Calvert County
- Dorchester County
- Kent County
- Talbot County
- Worcester County

This bill, which reduces the threshold to theaters with 4 or more screens, will help resolve this issue by ensuring that more movie theaters statewide—particularly in Eastern Shore, Southern Maryland, and Western Maryland—are able to provide more open captioned movies. For example, right now, only one movie theater is currently required to show open captions in the Eastern Shore area. With this bill, there will be up to five additional theaters, which is a 500% increase for accessibility for the Eastern Shore.

Open captioning means that everyone can enjoy the movie together, without needing separate devices for access. Right now, we must rely on bulky, uncomfortable glasses or a cupholder device that often malfunctions or dies. Precious time is taken away from movie enjoyment by going to the lobby to either replace or, if no replacement is available, get free ticket vouchers to come again another time. It's inconvenient and time consuming. Open captioned movies eliminate these problems, providing a more streamlined and enjoyable experience for all moviegoers.

I am hopeful that Maryland will lead the nation in ensuring equal access to movies for everyone. Passing this bill would make our state a shining example of inclusivity and accessibility.

Thank you again for your support over the years. Let's continue to work together to make Maryland a more welcoming and accessible state for all residents.

Jacob Leffler