



Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony
HB 866 – Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind,
and Hard of Hearing - Extension
Thursday, March 26, 2026
Position: Favorable

President

Tina Joyner

The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the interests of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders in matters of accessibility, civil rights, and equity. There are approximately 1.2 million Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals living in the State of Maryland.

Vice President

Jacob Leffler

We write to express our strong support for HB 866, sponsored by Delegate Kaufman, regarding the Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing - Extension.

Secretary

Payal Sweet

For many Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders, navigating state systems can be overwhelming. Individuals often encounter communication barriers when seeking healthcare, housing assistance, employment services, mental health care, and public benefits. Without coordinated support, these barriers can lead to delayed services, lost opportunities, and preventable crises.

Treasurer

Smita Kothari

We believe HB 866 is a critical step toward ensuring equitable access to services, resources, and opportunities for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals across our state. While meaningful progress has been made, significant gaps remain in access to communication, healthcare, education, employment, and state services.

Board Members

Meredith DeSomma

Vikki Porter

Theo Conley

Kitty Fogarty

Bill Millios

Thelma Schroeder

The continuation of the workgroup through 2028 is essential. The challenges faced by these communities are complex and require sustained, thoughtful collaboration among stakeholders, state agencies, and community members. Extending the timeline allows for more comprehensive data collection, deeper engagement, and the development of actionable, long-term solutions.

Importantly, HB 866 goes beyond study by requiring specialized case management services. These provisions will provide immediate, tangible benefits by helping individuals navigate critical systems and access the support they need to live independently and fully participate in society.

We respectfully urge the Committee to give HB 866 a favorable report. This legislation reflects Maryland's commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunity for all residents.

Sincerely,

MDAD Board of Directors