

HB0866Testimony (4).pdf

Uploaded by: Aaron Kaufman

Position: FAV



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony

Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing - Extension HB 866

Delegate Aaron Kaufman

03/26 at 1:00 p.m.

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Committee.

I am Delegate Aaron Kaufman, and I respectfully request a favorable report on HB866, Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Extension.

This Workgroup was originally established through House Bill 1069, which was favorably reported by this Committee and enacted in 2024. Its purpose was to examine systemic service gaps impacting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders. The findings to date highlight ongoing barriers in behavioral health access, transportation, interpreter coordination, employment services, and cross-agency case management. Following discussions with the Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, we discovered that there are many issues that still need to be researched and examined by the Workgroup. This bill extends the Workgroup through December 31, 2028, with a final report due to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2028.

The Workgroup has made progress and has already generated concrete recommendations this session. For instance, one of their recommendations was to rename the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to the Governor's Office of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing to accurately reflect the

AARON M. KAUFMAN
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Health Committee



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communities it serves. I introduced HB439 this legislative session and it passed the House unanimously and is currently in the Senate¹. This reflects that the recommendations are producing concrete legislative results. HB866 allows the Workgroup to complete a comprehensive, data-driven evaluation and deliver durable, fiscally responsible recommendations.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB866. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ H.B. 439, 2026 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Md. 2026), <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2026RS/bills/hb/hb0439F.pdf>

The Arc Maryland - HB 866 Testimony - Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Ande Kolp

Position: FAV



Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment

HB0866 - Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing - Extension

March 26, 2026

Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is a statewide advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We work to protect and advance the rights of people with disabilities and to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need.

The Arc Maryland supports HB0866, sponsored by Delegate Aaron Kaufman, because it will improve the lives of Marylanders who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing.

Many deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing Marylanders face challenges navigating state systems like healthcare, housing, employment, mental health care, and public benefits assistance.

Case Managers offer coordinated support by connecting individuals with appropriate services and programs, coordinating communication access and accommodations, and assisting with interagency navigation.

Maryland's Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing plays a critical role in making recommendations for these specialized case management services. They also study and assess programs that support educational, employment, health, and social opportunities for individuals. Their recommendations help identify the barriers in communication access to improve the quality of life of individuals in the community.

Providing the workgroup with the proper time to submit its report and findings, by December 1, 2028, will improve case management services in Maryland, and ensure more efficient, accountable, and equitable access to services.

For these reasons, The Arc Maryland supports HB0866 and requests a favorable report.

For additional information, please contact:

Ande Kolp, Executive Director

akolp@thearcmd.org

HB0866_EEE_FAV_MDOD_2026.03.24.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Anne Blackfield

Position: FAV

Carol A. Beatty, Secretary
Anne Blackfield, Deputy Secretary

Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor



BILL: HB 866

POSITION: FAV - Favorable

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy and the Environment

HEARING DATE: March 26, 2026

SUBMITTED BY: Maryland Department of Disabilities

217 East Redwood Street, Suite 1300, Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) is pleased to submit this letter of support for **HB 866, Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing – Extension.**

This legislation extends the termination date and reporting deadline for the Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing, which was originally established by Chapters 442 and 443 of the Acts of 2024. Specifically, the bill extends the deadline for the workgroup to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly to Dec 01, 2028. It also extends the workgroup's operations through Dec 31, 2028.

The extension is necessary to allow the workgroup sufficient time to continue and complete its comprehensive study and assessment of relevant State programs, policies, and engagement activities. MDOD believes this extension is vital to ensuring the workgroup can produce thoughtful and data-driven recommendations that will improve the delivery of services to all of Maryland's Deafblind, Deaf, and Hard of Hearing residents.

Thank you for your consideration. MDOD respectfully requests **a favorable report on HB 866.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carol A. Beatty".

Carol A. Beatty
Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities

MDAD Letter Written Testimony HB 866 EEE.docx - Go

Uploaded by: MDAD President MDAD President

Position: FAV



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

GODHH Testimony for HB866.docx (2).pdf

Uploaded by: Usherla DeBerry

Position: FAV

Wes Moore
Governor

Usherla DeBerry
Director

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

SUBJECT: Testimony on HB866 (Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing - Extension)

Position: Favorable

HEARING DATE: March 26, 2026

The Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) respectfully submits this Letter of Support for HB0866, the extension of the Maryland Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Workgroup.

The Workgroup was established to examine systemic barriers affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders in areas such as communication access, employment, healthcare, emergency preparedness, education, and interagency coordination. Through collaboration among State agencies, community organizations, and advocacy groups, the Workgroup has made meaningful progress in identifying service gaps and evaluating potential policy improvements.

ODHH supports extending the Workgroup to allow additional time for comprehensive data collection, stakeholder engagement, and development of thoughtful, actionable recommendations. Because many of the issues under review involve cross-agency coordination and long-term policy considerations, additional time will help ensure that further recommendations are well-developed, operationally feasible, and aligned with Maryland's fiscal and administrative framework.

An extension will strengthen the quality of the Workgroup's final report and provide the General Assembly with more complete, data-informed findings to guide future decision-making. ODHH

appreciates the Committee's continued commitment to improving access and equity for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders and respectfully urges favorable consideration of HB0866.

Thank you for your consideration. ODHH remains available to provide additional information or respond to any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Director Usherla DeBerry

Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

HB866_VikkiPorter_MGA_Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Vikki Porter

Position: FAV

Vikki Porter's HB866 Written Testimony

Position: Favorable

Good day, everyone:

I'm happy to be here to testify in favor of HB866 (Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing-Extension). I am a current member of the workgroup in question, and we have done a lot thus far, and yet still have much, much, much more work to do. This extension to December 31, 2028 would help tremendously towards that effort.

As former Secretary of the Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH), I saw for myself the obstacles that Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing Marylanders had to navigate...sometimes having to go above, around, beyond, and through these obstacles. MACDHH usually hosts townhalls after the quarterly council meetings. These townhalls were opportunities for these constituents and/or their personal caregivers or professional case managers to express their frustrations in getting adequate services from the state of Maryland. As a current Board Member of the Maryland Association of the Deaf, I frequently hear from members and nonmembers about similar issues. Lack of communication was the number one complaint, as well as attitudinal bias towards the Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing communities.

With the additional timeframe, the workgroup can continue to perform data collection, study the complex intricacies of various services provided by different agencies, identify gaps and overlaps, and develop strategies to enable the community to obtain much needed case management services with much less red tape.

I strongly encourage the committee to give a favorable rating for this bill. Thank you very much!

Vikki Porter

Member, Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing

Board Member, Maryland Association of the Deaf

Former Secretary, Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing