

Wes Moore
Governor

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



Usherla DeBerry
Director

TO: Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and the Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

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

SUBJECT: Testimony on HB435/SB259 (Places of Public Accommodation - Open Movie Captioning)

Position: Favorable

HEARING DATE: February 17, 2026

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections,

On behalf of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 435, legislation that expands access to open captioning in motion picture theaters across Maryland.

Captioning, particularly open captions, is essential to ensuring meaningful access to films for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. As places of public accommodation, movie theaters should be inclusive and accessible to all members of the community. House Bill 435 advances this principle by increasing the availability of captioned screenings and strengthening accountability through reporting requirements.

It is especially important that this legislation apply to rural areas. Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals live throughout the state, and access to captioned screenings should not depend on geography. Rural communities often have fewer entertainment options and, in many cases, only one local movie theater. When captioned screenings are not available, residents may have no reasonable alternative, effectively excluding them from full participation in community and cultural life.

Additionally, reliance on closed-captioning devices in smaller or rural theaters is often unreliable due to limited availability or equipment challenges. Open captioning provides a consistent, effective, and inclusive solution that allows individuals to attend screenings with family and friends without the need for special accommodations. Including rural theaters ensures that accessibility standards are applied equitably and consistently across Maryland.

Access to cultural and recreational experiences is a vital component of community inclusion. By ensuring statewide applicability, HB 435 helps reduce isolation, promotes equity, and upholds the civil rights of Deaf and hard-of-hearing Marylanders, regardless of where they live.

We commend the sponsors of this legislation for their leadership and respectfully urge a favorable report on House Bill 435.

Sincerely,

Director Usherla DeBerry, Ed.S.

Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing