



February 17, 2026

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Government, Labor, and Elections Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Baltimore City Association of the Deaf (BCAD) to express our strong support for **HB 435 – Places of Public Accommodation – Open Movie Captioning**, sponsored by Delegate Harry Bhandari.

This bill would require motion picture houses with fewer than eight screens—currently exempt under Maryland law—to offer open captioning for at least two screenings per week. The BCAD Board firmly believes this legislation will significantly benefit the diverse population of Baltimore City, including children and adults learning to read, senior citizens, veterans, individuals with learning or developmental disabilities, English language learners, and members of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities.

In addition to benefiting Baltimore City residents, HB 435 will expand accessibility across the state, including the Eastern Shore, Western Maryland, and other counties where open captioned films are not currently available. By lowering the screen threshold for required open captioned screenings, this bill will ensure that more theaters throughout Maryland can serve a wider range of patrons, regardless of where they live.

At present, no movie theaters in Baltimore City are required to provide open captioned screenings because the current law applies only to theaters with eight or more screens. HB 435 would address this gap by requiring four Baltimore City theaters to offer open captioned films:

- Senator Theatre – 4 screens
- Charles Theatre – 5 screens
- Harbor East Cinemas – 7 screens
- Warehouse Cinemas Rotunda – 7 screens

Many community members have shared the hardship of having to travel 30 minutes or more outside of Baltimore City to attend open captioned movie screenings. For many, a simple night at

the movies requires extensive planning, transportation, and additional expense. Passage of HB 435 would allow individuals and families to enjoy accessible screenings at neighborhood theaters, often just minutes away by car or on foot.

Implementing this legislation will ensure that open captioned movies are available to all members of the community while placing minimal burden on movie theater operators. Requiring just two open captioned screenings per week does not necessitate additional staffing and is unlikely to disrupt theater operations. In fact, it may increase attendance by attracting moviegoers who rely on or prefer captioning.

HB 435 represents a win-win solution—promoting inclusivity, expanding access to entertainment, and supporting local theaters. We respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter. We appreciate your support and commitment to making Maryland's communities more accessible to everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jacob Leffler". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Jacob Leffler
President
bcadeaf2020@gmail.com