



**Maryland Association of the Deaf**  
**Written Testimony**  
**HB 435 – Places of Public Accommodation - Open Movie Captioning**  
**Tuesday, February 17, 2026**  
**Position: Favorable**

**President**

Tina Joyner

The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization that protects the interests of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders concerning accessibility and equity issues. Currently, there are approximately 1.2 million of these individuals living in the State of Maryland.

**Vice President**

Jacob Leffler

MDAD is advocating for the passage of HB 435 sponsored by Delegate Bhandari regarding movie theater captioning. This bill requires that movie theaters with four or more screens provide open captioning for a minimum of two screenings each week. This effort would help further expand access to open captioned (OC) movies particularly in Western Maryland, North Central Maryland, Southern Maryland, and Eastern Shore areas. In addition, Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing customers and/or those with neurodivergent conditions from the surrounding states of Delaware, District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia would more likely patronize the theaters in these areas. They will bring in additional revenue into the State of Maryland beyond its borders.

**Secretary**

Payal Sweet

**Treasurer**

Smita Kothari

It is vital that the State of Maryland continues to take the helm in ensuring that movie theaters provide open captioning accessibility. The practice of providing closed captioning devices (glasses et al) has historically been riddled with numerous and documented issues such as malfunctions and physical/mental wear and tear for users. These devices have been proven to not contribute at all to an enjoyable and inclusive movie-going experience—stripping users of the ability to remain invisible and maintain their dignity.

**Board Members**

Meredith DeSomma

Vikki Porter

Theo Conley

Kitty Fogarty

Bill Millios

Thelma Schroeder

As a reminder, open captioned movies benefit not just the Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing customers and those with neurodivergent conditions, but a larger segment of the movie-going public—including but not limited to—children, senior citizens, and those learning English as a second language. MDAD looks forward to a favorable report on HB 435.

Thank you,

MDAD Board of Directors