

Thank you, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to explain why this bill is critically important for passage in the House.

First, I want to express my sincere gratitude for your past support and leadership in passing the previous version of this bill, which was signed by the Governor in 2024. It is a pleasure to be here again to discuss this important issue—one that will ensure movie theaters across the State of Maryland are more accessible to everyone.

Currently, the law requires movie theaters with eight or more screens to provide open-captioned movies twice a week for the first three weeks after a film's release. However, this requirement applies to only 39 theaters statewide, leaving 15 theaters exempt from providing open-captioned movies. As a result, many people must drive up to an hour—or as far as 50 miles—just to see a movie with open captions.

Under the current law, theaters with seven or fewer screens are not required to provide open-captioned movies. This disproportionately affects counties where smaller theaters are the norm. In most cases, theaters in the following counties are exempt:

- Allegany County
- Baltimore City
- Calvert County
- Dorchester County
- Kent County
- Talbot County
- Worcester County

This bill would lower the threshold to theaters with four or more screens, helping to close this accessibility gap. It would ensure that more theaters statewide—particularly in the Eastern Shore, Southern Maryland, Western Maryland, and Baltimore City—can offer open-captioned movies. For example, at present, only one movie theater on the Eastern Shore is required to show open-captioned films. With the passage of this bill, up to five additional theaters would be included, representing a 500% increase in accessibility for the region.

Open captioning allows everyone to enjoy a movie together, without relying on separate assistive devices. Currently, many patrons must depend on bulky and uncomfortable captioning glasses or cup-holder devices that frequently malfunction or run out of battery. When these devices fail, valuable movie time is lost going back to the lobby to seek replacements—or, when no replacement is available, receiving vouchers to return another day. This process is inconvenient, frustrating, and time-consuming. Open-captioned movies eliminate these barriers and provide a seamless, enjoyable experience for all moviegoers.

I am hopeful that Maryland will continue to lead the nation in ensuring equal access to movies for everyone. Passing this bill would make our state a shining example of inclusivity and accessibility.

Thank you again for your continued support over the years. I look forward to working together to make Maryland a more welcoming and accessible state for all residents.

Jacob Leffler