



Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony
HB 311 – Public Schools - Individuals With Disabilities - Accessibility
and Emergency Planning
Wednesday, February 11, 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

We write to express our support for House Bill 311, sponsored by Delegate Kaufman, concerning accessibility and emergency planning in Maryland public schools for students with disabilities.

Secretary

Payal Sweet

For Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing students, emergencies present unique and serious challenges. Inaccessible emergency communication, lack of visual alerts, and inadequate planning can leave students unaware of critical instructions or unable to evacuate safely. While physical accessibility is essential, effective communication access is equally vital to ensuring that all students can respond appropriately in crisis situations.

Treasurer

Smita Kothari

HB 311 promotes greater accountability by requiring school systems to evaluate accessibility concerns as part of their safety planning and to document incidents where accessibility failures could impede evacuation or emergency response. These measures align with the principles of equal access and inclusion and can help prevent avoidable harm to students with disabilities.

Board Members

Meredith DeSomma

Vikki Porter

Theo Conley

Kitty Fogarty

Bill Millios

Thelma Schroeder

As implementation moves forward, MDAD encourages school systems to ensure that accessibility evaluations and emergency planning include communication access needs for Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing students, such as visual alerts, clear and accessible instructions, and appropriate accommodations during drills and real emergencies.

We thank Delegate Kaufman for his leadership on this issue and respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 311.

Sincerely,

MDAD Board of Directors