

Ways and Means
130 Taylor House Office Building
131 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

February 25, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Meredith DeSomma. I am a Deaf parent of two Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, and I am here today representing parents across Maryland in strong support of HB 879.

From my lived experience and what I have witnessed in our community, many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals experience language deprivation. My husband is one of them. He did not have full access to language until he was eighteen years old. He openly shares that he struggled for many years because he lacked the language foundation needed to truly thrive.

Language deprivation happens for many reasons — lack of information, lack of resources, delayed exposure to accessible language, or a “wait and see” approach. Currently, language deprivation often occurs because parents do not receive full, balanced information about ASL, English, and intervention services that focus on language development. But regardless of the reason, the impact on a child can be lifelong.

I am here for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in Maryland who are at risk of language deprivation — and for the families who may not yet understand how critical early, fully accessible language truly is.

Language deprivation is not simply an educational delay. It affects brain development, emotional health, behavior, and long-term success. The early years of life are the most critical window for language development. Deaf and Hard of Hearing children cannot afford to “wait and see.” When accessible language is delayed, the consequences can last a lifetime.

Language is more than communication.

Language is access.

Language is safety.

Language is identity.

Supporting parents means ensuring families receive clear, accurate, and balanced information from the very beginning, monitoring language milestones — not to judge, but to ensure children are developing as they should — and providing access to resources, early intervention, and language opportunities for the entire family. It means equipping parents with knowledge and community so they can make informed decisions that protect their child’s right to language.

HB 879 ensures that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in Maryland are monitored for language milestones and that families receive the information and support they need. This bill does not take away parental choice. It protects children and equips families with knowledge.

We cannot give children back the early years once they are lost. But today, you have the power to prevent that loss for others.

I respectfully ask you to vote yes on HB 879 and protect every Deaf and Hard of Hearing child’s right to language.

Thank you,

Meredith DeSomma