

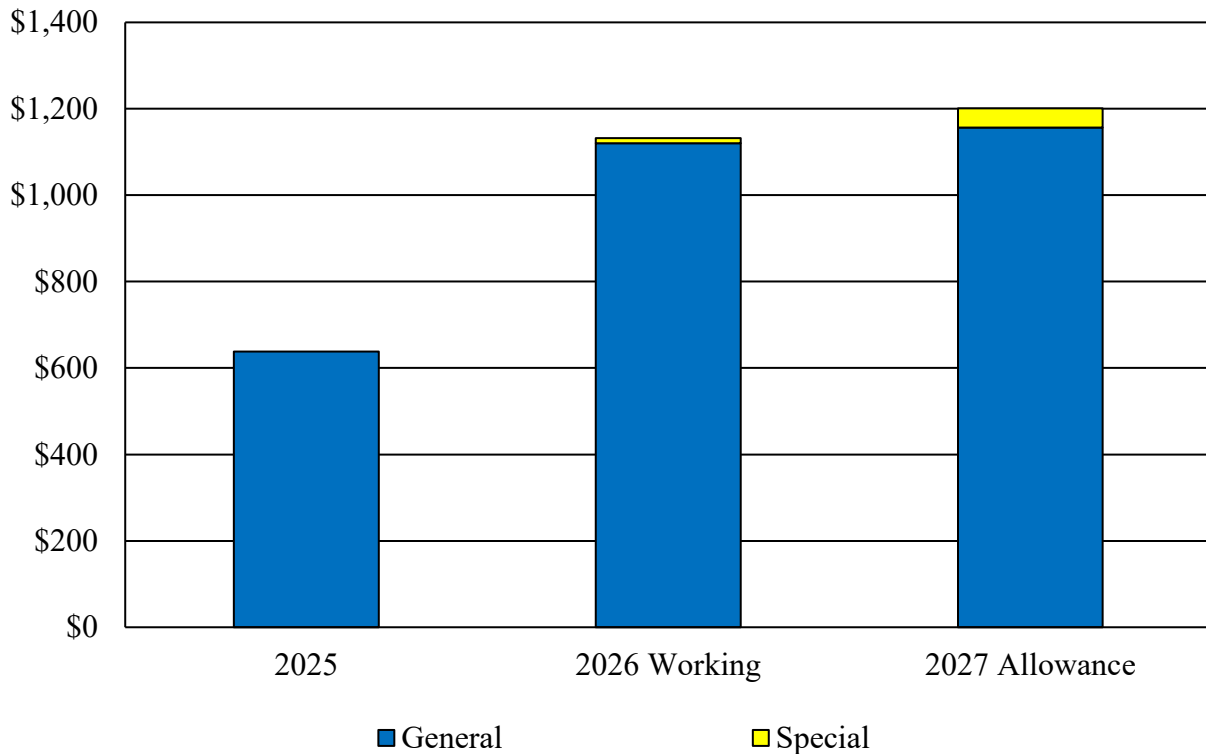
D11A0401
Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Program Description

The Governor’s Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) promotes the general welfare of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals in Maryland by addressing policy gaps, providing expertise on issues relevant to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, and facilitating access to resources and services. ODHH also offers information and referral services to support community engagement. The office’s key goals include providing all Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens equal and full access to State programs, resources, and services to fully participate in community life and enhancing awareness among Marylanders regarding the needs and challenges faced by individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Operating Budget Summary

Fiscal 2027 Budget Increases \$69,116, or 6.1%, to \$1.2 Million
(\$ in Thousands)



Note: The fiscal 2027 statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in the Department of Budget and Management and are not included in this agency’s budget.

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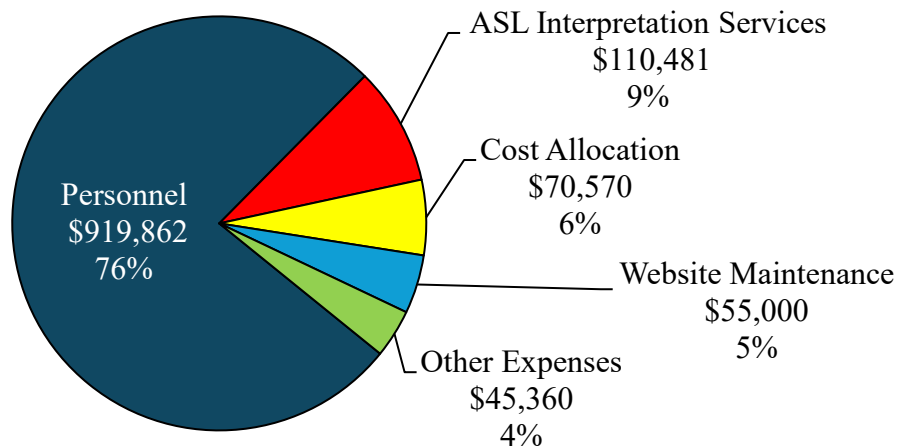
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- Although ODHH is mainly supported by general funds, beginning in fiscal 2026, a limited amount of special funds are available to the agency. Chapters 269 and 270 of 2023 (the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act) established the Sign Language Interpreters Fund as a special, nonlapsing fund administered by ODHH. This fund is to receive revenue generated by fees for the issuance and renewal of sign language interpreters’ licenses and other services, which must be used to cover documented costs of fulfilling the duties of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI). In the fiscal 2027 allowance, the appropriation from the fund increases from \$12,000 to \$45,000 (275%) due to the projected timing for issuing sign language interpreter licenses. Additional discussion about licensing regulations can be found in Key Observation 1 of this analysis.

Fiscal 2027 Overview of Agency Spending

The fiscal 2027 allowance for ODHH totals \$1.2 million. As shown in **Exhibit 1**, personnel expenditures account for the majority of the budget, comprising 76% of the total fiscal 2027 allowance. The second largest portion is allocated to sign language interpreting services (9%). These services support internal operations as well as public meetings and in-person and virtual town halls.

Exhibit 1
Overview of Agency Spending
Fiscal 2027 Allowance



ASL: American Sign Language

Note: The fiscal 2027 statewide salary adjustments are centrally budgeted in the Department of Budget and Management and are not included in this agency’s budget.

Source: Governor’s Fiscal 2027 Budget Books

Proposed Budget Change

The fiscal 2027 allowance increases by \$69,116, or 6.1%, compared to the fiscal 2026 working appropriation. As shown in **Exhibit 2**, the primary drivers of this increase are personnel costs, an increase of \$78,780. Additionally, sign language interpreter costs funded by the Sign Language Interpreters Special Fund increase by \$35,000. These increased funds will support meetings and town halls associated with the implementation of the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act, which is discussed further in Key Observation 1 of this analysis. These increases are countered by the elimination of ODHH’s contractual administrative assistant position, which was budgeted at \$31,084 in fiscal 2026.

**Exhibit 2
Proposed Budget
Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
(\$ in Thousands)**

How Much It Grows:	General Fund	Special Fund	Total
Fiscal 2025 Actual	\$638	\$0	\$638
Fiscal 2026 Working	1,120	12	1,132
Fiscal 2027 Allowance	1,156	45	1,201
Fiscal 2026-2027 \$ Change	36	33	69
Fiscal 2026-2027 % Change	3.2%	275.0%	6.1%

Where It Goes:	<u>Change</u>
Personnel Expenses	
Salary increases and associated fringe benefits	\$41
Employee and retiree health insurance	37
Other fringe benefit adjustments	1
Sign Language Interpreters Special Fund	
Sign language interpreter services due to implementation of the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act.....	35
SBSLI travel	-2
Other Changes	
Cost allocations.....	-5
Per diem payments for board travel expenses	-6
Elimination of contractual executive assistant position.....	-31

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Where It Goes:	<u>Change</u>
Other changes	-1
Total	\$69

SBSLI: State Board of Sign Language Interpreters

Note: Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding. The fiscal 2027 allowance does not include statewide salary adjustments budgeted within the Department of Budget and Management.

Personnel Data

	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY 26-27
	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Working</u>	<u>Allowance</u>	<u>Change</u>
Regular Positions	7.00	7.00	7.00	0.00
Contractual FTEs	<u>1.00</u>	<u>1.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>-1.00</u>
Total Personnel	8.00	8.00	7.00	-1.00

Vacancy Data: Regular Positions

Turnover and Necessary Vacancies, Excluding New Positions	0.00	0.00%
Positions and Percentage Vacant as of 12/31/2025	4.00	57.14%
 Vacancies Above Turnover	 4.00	

- As of December 31, 2025, ODHH had 4 positions that have been vacant for more than a year, including some that have never been filled. Regarding these vacancies, ODHH indicated that these 4 positions have been kept vacant due to delays in the implementation of the Sign Language Interpreters Act and the Statewide hiring freeze. However, the agency notes that they intend to fill these positions by the end of fiscal 2026. While ODHH plans for 3 of the vacant positions have remained consistent, plans for the fourth vacant position have changed over time. **The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends abolishing 1 of the vacant positions that has been vacant for more than one year.**

Key Observations

1. Licensure and Regulation of Sign Language Interpreters Delayed

Chapters 269 and 270 (the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act) established a licensing and regulatory system for sign language interpreters under SBSLI within ODHH. Fraudulent sign language interpretation has been a rising issue both in Maryland and nationally, and this new system is meant to ensure that interpreters in Maryland are qualified to provide services. While Chapters 269 and 270 required SBSLI to establish and publish licensing requirements by July 1, 2024, requirements were not published by the required date.

Committee narrative in the *2025 Joint Chairmen's Report (JCR)* requested that ODHH submit a report indicating that it has published the State sign language licensing requirements and explaining reasons for the publishing delay. This report was submitted in June 2025, after ODHH submitted proposed licensing requirements for public comment. In this report, ODHH stated that the main challenges were changes made to the regulations by the assistant Attorney General and delays throughout the approval process. Proposed regulations were approved by the Division of State Documents in May 2025 and were then submitted for public comment. After ODHH received public comment on the regulations, SBSLI issued corrections, resubmitting them in August 2025 for another 30-day comment period. However, during this comment period, ODHH received a large number of comments expressing concern and confusion about the requirements. According to ODHH, many of these comments pertained to the statute itself.

Acknowledging the high volume of concerns, ODHH announced in November 2025 that it was pausing the development of regulations. That month, the Governor's Office convened a working group in coordination with ODHH and SBSLI. This working group includes various stakeholders and community advocates who will review and evaluate proposals for potential changes to the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act. The workgroup began meeting in December to discuss the concerns expressed and determine if statutory changes are necessary. **DLS recommends adopting committee narrative requesting that ODHH submit two reports with updates on the development of State sign language interpreter licensing regulations.**

2. Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing

Chapters 442 and 443 of 2024 established a workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) to study and make recommendations regarding services, programs, advocacy, outreach, and other efforts to improve the quality of life of individuals who are DDBHH. On May 30, 2025, the workgroup submitted its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. In this report, the workgroup recommended the following:

- ODHH should implement a DDBHH unit that provides case management services and advocacy, comprised of a case manager supervisor, case manager, and a DeafBlind advocate/case manager. ODHH would contribute 2 positions to this unit, while 1 or more

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would come from other undefined entities. The workgroup envisions establishing an independent commission to take on this work in the future.

- If the DDBHH unit is incorporated into ODHH, the commission recommends amending ODHH scope of work in regulations to explicitly include the unit and planned services to ensure that the services provided by the DDBHH unit do not change with leadership or priority changes.
- A DDBHH coalition of case managers that meets two or more times a year should be created to ensure that case managers from State agencies who serve DDBHH individuals are served and served by the appropriate agency in order to avoid duplication of services.

The workgroup terminates June 30, 2026, though it has requested an extension to expand on charges of the workgroup that it believes have not been addressed completely.

Operating Budget Recommended Actions

		<u>Amount Change</u>	<u>Position Change</u>
1.	Delete 1 vacant position (087750) and associated funding. This position has been vacant for more than one year.	-\$111,716 GF	-1.0

2. Adopt the following narrative:

Updates on State Sign Language Interpreter Licensing Requirements: Chapters 269 and 270 of 2023 (Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act) required the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters to establish and publish licensing requirements for sign language interpreters by July 1, 2024. While proposed regulations were submitted for public comment in June 2025, the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) announced in November 2025 that the development of regulations was being paused due to concerns raised during the public comment period. The committees request that ODHH submit two reports on regulation development and implementation, discussing:

- concerns raised during the public comment period that necessitated the pause in regulation development;
- any statutory changes recommended by the Governor’s new working group;
- progress toward establishing State sign language licensing requirements and projected timeline for publishing the requirements; and
- updated timeline for the availability of the licensing portal for public use.

The first report should cover the requested information as of May 31, 2026, and be submitted by July 1, 2026, and the second report should cover the requested information as of November 31, 2026, and be submitted by December 15, 2026.

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Information Request	Author	Due Date	
Updates on State sign language interpreter licensing requirements	ODHH	July 1, 2026 December 15, 2026	
Total Net Change to Fiscal 2027 Allowance		-\$111,716	-1.0

Appendix 1
2025 Joint Chairmen’s Report Responses from Agency

The 2025 JCR requested that ODHH prepare one report. Electronic copies of the full JCR response can be found on the DLS Library website.

- ***State Sign Language Interpreter Licensing Requirements:*** On June 16, 2025, ODHH submitted a report that it has published the State sign language interpreter licensing requirements for public comment and explaining reasons for the publishing delay. In this report, ODHH also described other activities being undertaken to prepare for licensing of interpreters, including staff review of license applications and other forms as well as meetings to prepare the licensing portal. Further discussion of the regulation status is included in Key Observation 1.

Appendix 2
Object/Fund Difference Report
Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

<u>Object/Fund</u>	<u>FY 25</u> <u>Actual</u>	<u>FY 26</u> <u>Working</u> <u>Appropriation</u>	<u>FY 27</u> <u>Allowance</u>	<u>FY 26 - 27</u>	
				<u>\$ Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Positions					
01 Regular	7.00	7.00	7.00	0.00	0.0%
02 Contractual	1.00	1.00	0.00	-1.00	-100.0%
Total Positions	8.00	8.00	7.00	-1.00	-12.5%
Objects					
01 Salaries, Wages, and Fringe Benefits	\$354,371	\$841,082	\$919,862	\$78,780	9.4%
02 Technical and Special Fees	15,920	37,084	0	-37,084	-100.0%
03 Communications	640	2,788	2,752	-36	-1.3%
04 Travel	3,666	19,508	17,508	-2,000	-10.3%
08 Contractual Services	259,171	217,595	246,785	29,190	13.4%
09 Supplies and Materials	1,129	6,000	6,000	0	0.0%
10 Equipment – Replacement	0	4,500	4,500	0	0.0%
13 Fixed Charges	3,420	3,600	3,866	266	7.4%
Total Objects	\$638,317	\$1,132,157	\$1,201,273	\$69,116	6.1%
Funds					
01 General Funds	\$638,317	\$1,120,157	\$1,156,273	\$36,116	3.2%
03 Special Funds	0	12,000	45,000	33,000	275.0%
Total Funds	\$638,317	\$1,132,157	\$1,201,273	\$69,116	6.1%

Note: The fiscal 2027 allowance does not include statewide salary adjustments budgeted within the Department of Budget and Management.