Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Maryland
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Annual Report

July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

FY25

gov.odhh@maryland.gov

Table of Contents

Governor's Letter 4
Director's Letter 5
Governor's Coordinating Offices 6
Responsibilities & Priorities 7
Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing 8
Recommendations 9
Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 10
State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Ecosystem 12
Portal Campaigning 13
Partnerships 18
Canvassing Across Maryland 19
Maryland Vehicle Administration Journey 20
Human Trafficking 22
Annual Open House 23
Resources for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing 26
Expanding the Deaf Ecosystem 26
Legislative Awareness Day 2024 27
State Trainings 29
Statewide 29
Internal 30
GODHH Town Hall 33
Customer Inquiries 34
Videos Created by GODHH 35
Managing for Results 36
Staff 36
We are GODHH 37

"We need people willing to serve.
We need talented individuals who put the whole before the self."
- Governor Wes Moore

Maryland
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Governor
Wes Moore

Lieutenant Governor
Aruna Miller

Director
Usherla DeBerry

Governor Wes Moore's Letter

As Governor of Maryland, it is my honor to present the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 2025 Annual Report.

This report reflects the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's impactful contributions to our state and its continued commitment to serving Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders. Ensuring that all Marylanders can communicate effectively, fully participate, and thrive remains a core priority of my administration.

In fiscal year 2025, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing continued to serve as a vital pillar of support for its stakeholders. I am deeply proud of the dedication demonstrated by the team throughout the past year, particularly as they worked diligently to prepare for the implementation of sign language interpreter licensure in Maryland. Establishing a licensure framework is a critical step toward strengthening communication access statewide and promoting high-quality, professional sign language interpreting in essential settings, including healthcare, education, and the justice system. The effort reflects our shared commitment to accountability, consistency, and respect for the needs of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders.

Through extensive outreach, collaboration with stakeholders, partnerships with state agencies, and engagement with community members, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing laid important groundwork to support a system that upholds professional standards while centering accessibility and equity. The efforts ensure that Maryland continues moving toward a more inclusive future where no one is left behind; where communication barriers are reduced, and opportunities are expanded.

I extend my sincere gratitude for the leadership, dedication, and tireless efforts of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing team, as well as the community partners who make this work possible. Together, we are building a stronger, more accessible Maryland where the general welfare of individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing is advanced and protected.

Sincerely,

Governor Wes Moore

Director Usherla DeBerry's Letter

As we reflect on the past year, I want to recognize and express deep appreciation for the essential role that sign language interpreters and language access programs play in advancing equity, communication, and quality service for the communities we serve. Their work is foundational to ensuring Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals can fully access information, services, and care with dignity and independence.

This year, we continued to experience a high and growing demand for qualified interpreters, highlighting both the importance of these services and the challenges involved in meeting community needs. Despite workforce shortages and increasing service requests, our teams remained committed to delivering high-quality language access while exploring innovative approaches to improve availability, efficiency, and sustainability.

Collaboration has been a key focus of our progress. We strengthened existing partnerships, reconnected with trusted organizations we have worked with in the past, and established new relationships with community-based and professional organizations. These collaborations have expanded our capacity, enhanced shared learning, and reinforced a collective commitment to access and inclusion.

Equally important has been our dedication to listening directly to the community. Hosting town halls and community forums created space for open dialogue, feedback, and shared problem-solving. These conversations have been invaluable in helping us better understand lived experiences, identify gaps, and shape programs that are responsive to real needs rather than assumptions.

Looking ahead, we remain fully committed to investing in interpreter services, deepening partnerships, and continuing transparent engagement with the communities we serve. True access is not static; it requires ongoing collaboration, accountability, and trust. We are grateful to our interpreters, partners, staff, and community members who make this work possible and who continue to guide us forward.

Together, we will continue to build systems where communication access is not an afterthought, but a standard.

Sincerely,

Usherla DeBerry

Governor's Coordinating Offices

The Governor's Coordinating Offices serve as direct extensions of the Governor, helping turn statewide priorities into action. Each office offers specialized expertise and works closely with state agencies and community partners to promote collaboration, coordination, and the sharing of information. This structure ensures the Governor stays informed about the real needs and concerns of people across Maryland while supporting effective and responsive government.

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) functions as one of the Governor's coordinating offices by serving as the central point of expertise and collaboration on issues affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals across state government. GODHH works across agencies to promote consistent and accessible policies, provides guidance and technical assistance on language access and communication accessibility, and helps align resources to improve service delivery. The Office coordinates with Maryland State agencies, local governments, and community partners to elevate community priorities and ensure Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing perspectives are reflected in statewide initiatives.

The Governor's Coordinating Offices include:

The Governor's Grants Office
The Governor's Office for Children
The Governor's Office of Community Initiatives
The Governor's Office of Performance Improvement
The Governor's Office of Small, Minority & Women Business Affairs
The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention

Learn more about the Governor's coordinating offices here:
https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/08conoff/coord/html/00list.html
https://www.maryland.gov/pages/agency_directory.aspx

Responsibilities

Established in October 2001 pursuant to Chapter 537 of the Acts of the General Assembly, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) promotes the welfare of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders in accordance with State Government Article §9-2407. The Office provides policy leadership, subject-matter expertise, and interagency coordination to support equitable access to state resources, services, and opportunities. GODHH also works to improve access to communication, programs, and services; collaborates with state and local agencies to ensure accessible safety and emergency services; and advances educational, health, and social opportunities for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

The mission of GODHH is to represent the Governor, guided by the priorities of the Moore–Miller Administration, and to advance equality and accessibility for all Marylanders by offering expertise that strengthens the overall well-being of Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents. The Office's vision of success is a Maryland where individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing have full and equal access to resources, services, and opportunities to participate in every aspect of community life.

Priorities

Our office's priorities align with the Moore-Miller Administration, which aims to leave no one behind by:

1. Ending Child Poverty in the State of Maryland
2. Setting Maryland's Students Up for Success
3. Creating an Equitable, Robust, and Competitive Economy
4. Connecting Marylanders to Jobs
5. Creating Safer Communities
6. Making the State of Maryland a Desirable and Affordable Home for All Residents
7. Advancing Infrastructure to Better Connect All Marylanders to Opportunities and Each Other
8. Ensuring World-Class Health Systems for All Marylanders
9. Making Maryland a Leader in Clean Energy and the Greenest State in the Country
10. Making Maryland a State of Service

Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing

In July 2024, the General Assembly authorized the establishment of the Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing through Chapters 442 and 443 of the Acts of 2024. The Workgroup was created to evaluate existing services and systems and to develop recommendations that improve access, equity, and outcomes for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) individuals across the State.

The Workgroup is charged with examining the availability and effectiveness of direct and specialized case management services; assessing the development and administration of programs that support education, employment, health, and social participation; and identifying opportunities to strengthen coordination among State agencies and optimize the use of State resources. In addition, the Workgroup seeks to identify barriers and gaps in communication access and propose solutions that enhance quality of life.

Central to the Workgroup's mission is advancing advocacy efforts, increasing public awareness of the unique challenges faced by DDBHH individuals, and promoting policies and legislative initiatives that address these needs. The Workgroup also aims to foster greater civic engagement and inclusion by strengthening connections between the DDBHH community and the broader public.

Members:

The Workgroup is composed of thirteen members: ten appointed by the Governor, one by the Senate President, one by the House Speaker, and one serving ex officio.

Chair: Dr. Leo Yates

1. Dr. Leo Yates - Division of Rehabilitative Services, Maryland Department of Education
2. Dr. Mary Perrodin-Singh - DCABDA – District of Columbia Area Black Deaf Advocates
3. Respicius Batamula - Community advocate & international program leader for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing
4. Heidi Burghardt - Howard County Association of the Deaf, Maryland School of the Deaf
5. Marcus Smith - Maryland Relay, Host of BusBoys and Poets Open Mic Night for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

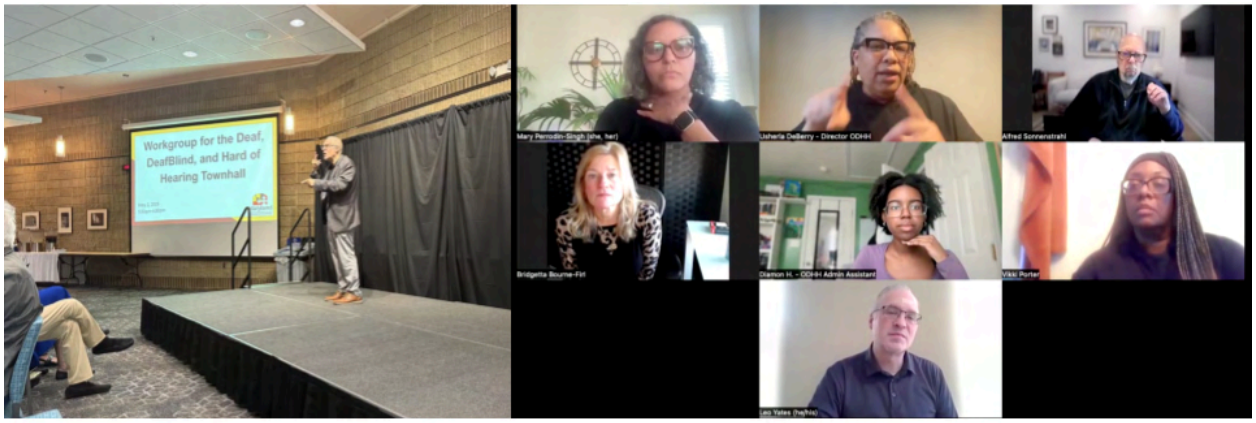
6. Samantha Simpson - Washington County Community Leader
7. Bridgetta Bourne-Firl - Project Coordinator, Maryland Deaf Community Center (MDCC)
8. Vikki Porter - Maryland Association of the Deaf
9. Blake Sansonese - Eastern Deaf Timberfest Interpreting Committee, Freelance ASL Interpreter
10. Seat 10 - VACANT

All meeting summaries and videos can be found here: https://odhh.maryland.gov/meeting-notes/

Recommendations:

The recommendations from the workgroup were submitted on Friday, May 30, 2025. The report's primary recommendation calls for the establishment of a permanent DDBH Unit within the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH), including three case management positions, one of which would serve as a dedicated DeafBlind case manager and advocate. Implementation would require amendments to COMAR to codify the unit and ensure continuity across administrations.

Read the full recommendation here.



Maryland
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

MACDHH Meetings & Members

The Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was established in October 2001 to advise and support the Maryland Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The Governor appoints the Council's members, which include a Chair, a Vice Chair, and 18 dedicated individuals. Half of the members represent state agencies, and the other half come directly from the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community, making sure every voice is heard.

The Council Members met on the following dates:

September 13, 2024	CCBC Center for Arts, 360 Campus Drive, Catonsville, MD 21228
March 7, 2025	GODHH Office, 100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD 21032
June 6, 2025	GODHH Office, 100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD 21032

Members:

Chair: Norma Moran, Citizen	**Vice Chair:** Mark Tesoro, Maryland Department of Aging
Dianna Yamada, Citizen	Cleveland Horton II, Maryland Commission on Civil Rights
Veronica Davila Steele, Citizen	Lauren Whiteman, Maryland Department of Health
Dawn Padon, Private Agency	Dr. Paige Bradford, Maryland State Department of Education
Special Expertise - Vacant	MDOT - Vacant
Bo A. Byun D.M.D., Citizen	Allegra Hollins, DHCD
Citizen- Vacant	Yolanda Dockery, Department of Human Services
Edwin Martinez Jr., DeafBlind	John Serrano, Maryland School for the Deaf
Usherla DeBerry, Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Director	Kristen M. Patterson, Maryland Department of Labor (DLLR)

All meeting minutes can be found here: https://odhh.maryland.gov/meetings/

State Board of Sign Language Interpreters

The State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) was established in May 2023 to oversee the licensing of sign language interpreters in Maryland and promote high professional standards across the field. Operating under House Bill 260, the Board is responsible for ensuring that interpreters serving Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals are properly qualified and accountable to the community they serve.

The Board consists of seven members appointed by the Governor, each representing distinct perspectives within the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and interpreter communities. Membership includes one representative from the Maryland Association of the Deaf, one DeafBlind individual, and one member of the Potomac Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf who holds RID certification. The remaining four members are selected according to criteria established through Board regulations to ensure a balanced and inclusive representation.

The FY25 SBSLI Members met on the following dates and locations:

August 21, 2024	Virtual
September 26, 2024	Virtual
October 9, 2024	Virtual
December 18, 2024	Virtual
January 30, 2025	Virtual
April 2, 2025	Virtual

Members:

Chair: Trudy Suggs, *Community Member*	Vice Chair: Jacob Leffler, *Community Member*	Ritchie Bryant, *Maryland Association of the Deaf*	Vacant, *Potomac Chapter Registry for the Deaf*
Leslie Puzio, *Community Member*	Susan Beaver, *Community Member*	Paige Franklin, *DeafBlind Member*	

All meeting minutes can be found here: https://odhh.maryland.gov/board-meeting-minutes/

Portal Campaign

Sign Language Interpreter Portal Demonstrations

In the fall of 2024, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) conducted multiple demonstrations of the Sign Language Interpreter Portal across the state of Maryland. These demonstrations were designed to test the portal's accessibility and to provide interpreters with clear, step-by-step guidance on how to apply for licensure.

The sessions also introduced interpreters to OneStop Maryland, the State's centralized online licensing platform, which hosts the Sign Language Interpreter Portal. Through hands-on demonstrations, participants learned how to navigate the OneStop Maryland website (onestop.md.gov), complete required applications, and access relevant licensure information.

These outreach efforts supported interpreter readiness, improved understanding of the licensure process, and helped ensure equitable access to the portal for interpreters statewide.

Campaign Dates:

September 9, 2024	Community College of Baltimore County
September 11, 2024	Salisbury at Eastern Shore
October 23, 2024	Deafnet Association in Washington County
November 18, 2024	Deaf Independent Living Association in Eastern Shore

State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Town Halls

The State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) hosted three town hall meetings to engage stakeholders, share updates, and provide opportunities for public input. These meetings were held on the following dates:

November 10, 2024	Virtual
November 22, 2024	600 Watkins Park Dr, Upper Marlboro, MD 20774
December 9, 2024	5900 Metro Drive, Baltimore, MD 21215

Programs for the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters

In 2025, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) fostered a supportive learning environment for aspiring and practicing sign language interpreters by facilitating peer-supported study tables. These sessions were designed to assist interpreters in preparing for certification exams administered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) and the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI).

The study tables provided participants with opportunities to collaborate, share resources, and strengthen their knowledge and skills in a structured, supportive setting. Study sessions were held on the following dates at the Laurel Branch Library:

- March 8, 2025
- April 12, 2025
- May 6, 2025
- May 10, 2025
- June 10, 2025
- June 14, 2025

These efforts supported interpreter professional development and contributed to strengthening the quality and availability of interpreting services across the state.

Public Comment Campaign

From May 16 through June 16, 2025, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) conducted a 30-day public comment period, in accordance with the State of Maryland's regulatory process, to gather input on proposed regulations. Due to strong community interest, the period was extended through June 30, 2025. Feedback collected during this period will inform revisions to the regulations prior to submission to the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR) and publication by the Division of State Documents (DSD) in the *Maryland Register*.

During the comment period, GODHH received approximately 200 responses from members of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities, as well as sign language interpreters, reflecting a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and recommendations. To promote meaningful participation, GODHH conducted both in-person and virtual outreach, provided accessible submission options including video comments, and transcribed all video submissions for inclusion in the official record.

On May 31, 2025, GODHH hosted an in-person session for religious interpreters at the East Columbia Branch Library, located at 6600 Cradlerock Way, Columbia, MD 21045. Facilitated by four GODHH staff, the session addressed topics including RID membership, certification, licensing types (General, Provisional, Agency, and Provisional Educational), compensation, regulations, and public comment submission. A total of 27 individuals RSVP'd, with 23 attending and six additional participants attending without RSVPs.

On June 9, 2025, GODHH conducted a virtual public comment meeting via Zoom, which generated 31 responses submitted through the online Google Form.

On June 11, 2025, an in-person outreach session took place at the Deaf Independent Living Association (DILA), 806 Snow Hill Road, Salisbury, MD 21806. Three individuals registered; one attended with an employer, while two did not attend. Feedback from the participant was collected and incorporated into the public comment record.

On June 13, 2025, GODHH hosted an in-person session at DeafNet Association, Inc., 551 Jefferson Street, Hagerstown, MD 21740, with two participants submitting feedback onsite via the Google Form.

Across all outreach activities, GODHH ensured equitable access, accurate documentation of all feedback, and incorporation of responses into the official public comment record. By meeting the 30-day public comment requirement, conducting targeted outreach, and providing accessible submission options, the Public Comment Campaign strengthened community engagement and ensured that the perspectives of Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing individuals, and interpreters were meaningfully represented in Maryland's regulatory review process.

Lunch and Learn ASL Program

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) hosted the Lunch and Learn ASL Program to support individuals interested in learning foundational American Sign Language (ASL) skills. This program encouraged participants to develop basic ASL communication abilities to better interact with Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals within their offices, agencies, and departments.

Offered as monthly sessions during the lunch hour, the program promoted inclusive communication practices, increased awareness of Deaf culture, and strengthened accessibility across the state government. Sessions were held on the following dates:

- January 27, 2025
- February 26, 2025
- March 19, 2025
- April 21, 2025
- June 24, 2025

Partnerships

Partnerships are central to the mission and effectiveness of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH). Through strategic collaboration with State agencies, local governments, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and advocacy groups, GODHH works to improve access, coordination, and outcomes for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals across the State.

GODHH serves as a facilitator for subject matter and resources, facilitating communication between partners and the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community to ensure programs, services, and policies are accessible, culturally competent, and responsive to community needs. These partnerships support the Office's efforts to address systemic barriers, advance language and communication access, and promote equity in education, employment, health, and civic participation.

Collaboration with State agencies allows GODHH to provide guidance on accessibility requirements, best practices, and emerging needs, while also helping agencies better utilize existing resources and align efforts. Partnerships with community organizations and advocacy groups strengthen outreach, enhance public awareness, and ensure that lived experience informs policy development and service delivery.

Through ongoing partnerships, GODHH can amplify its impact, foster shared accountability, and advance coordinated, sustainable solutions that improve the quality of life for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals statewide. GODHH was co-lead or served as a rep on the following workgroups, councils, and committees:

Workgroups, Councils, and Committees:

Behavioral Health Advisory Council (BHAC)
Board of Social Work Workgroup
Cultural and Linguistic Competency Committee (CLCC)
Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC)
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network (DHHCAN)
Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GATBR)
Hearing Accessibility Advisory Board (HAAB)
Maryland Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI)
Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH)
National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH)
Program Advisory Committee (PAC)

Canvassing Across Maryland

The purpose of Canvassing Across Maryland is to ensure Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing people engage with and influence public policy and programs with their stories. They focus on the question of what is missing or what people love about their area. Their goal is to start small and focus on improving representation in one overlooked county at a time.

Tino Fragale has been the Director of Everyday Canvassing for 12 years. GODHH met with Tino and his team to discuss how to collect data from underserved Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals and towns across the state. They have joined us at our October 24, 2025, Town Hall in Hagerstown, MD. They also conducted interviews at our November 15, 2024, Annual Open House to learn from the Deaf community about what would make their counties better. Our meetings took place on the following dates:

- August 9, 2024
- September 20, 2024
- November 22, 2024
- December 18, 2024

Maryland Vehicle Administration Accessibility Journey

On August 21, 2024, staff from the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) visited the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), led by Christine Nizer, MVA Administrator, to explore opportunities to improve accessibility and service delivery for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) community. The visit focused on identifying strategies to strengthen language access and ensure equitable access to essential services.

Vehicle administration offices provide legally required services that directly impact public safety, mobility, employment, and legal status. When language access is insufficient, individuals are not merely inconvenienced; they may face significant risks and barriers. The following outlines why language access at the MVA is critical.

Public Safety

The MVA is responsible for driver licensing, testing, and vehicle registration. When individuals are unable to fully understand traffic laws, licensing requirements, or vehicle compliance instructions, the risk of unsafe driving and accidents increases. Providing effective language access helps ensure that all drivers understand and follow the same rules of the road.

Legal Compliance and Fairness

Many MVA services are mandatory under state law. Without adequate language access, individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) or communication disabilities may unintentionally violate legal requirements. This can result in fines, license suspension, or denial of services due to misunderstandings rather than noncompliance. Language access supports equal treatment and due process.

Equal Access to Essential Services

Driving privileges often determine an individual's ability to travel to work or school, access healthcare, and care for family members. Interpretation services and translated materials help ensure that individuals with LEP or disabilities have equal—not reduced—access to these essential services.

Access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals

Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals may require qualified sign language interpreters, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), or clear visual instructions. Without these accommodations, communication barriers can lead to errors, delays, frustration, or denial of service. Accessible communication allows individuals to complete transactions independently and with dignity.

Accuracy and Operational Efficiency

Clear communication benefits both customers and staff. When language access is provided, forms are more likely to be completed accurately, repeat visits are reduced, and staff time spent correcting errors is minimized. Language access improves service efficiency and overall customer experience.

Trust in Government Services

Providing language access demonstrates respect, inclusion, and accountability. It builds trust between government agencies and the communities they serve and encourages compliance with laws and regulations. Language access at the MVA supports public safety, promotes equity, improves operational efficiency, and ensures that all individuals—regardless of language or disability—can navigate essential government services confidently and accurately.

Human Trafficking Town Hall

On May 21, 2025, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) partnered with Howard County's Department of Community Resources and Services to raise awareness of human trafficking within the Deaf community. This initiative highlighted the critical role of language access for individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, or have limited English proficiency, as effective communication can be the difference between remaining trapped in an exploitative situation and being able to seek help. Traffickers frequently exploit communication barriers to isolate, control, and silence victims.

Language barriers significantly increase vulnerability to human trafficking. Individuals with limited language access may rely on others to interpret, avoid asking questions due to fear or embarrassment, or lack a clear understanding of their rights and available resources. Traffickers often exploit this dependence by positioning themselves as the primary source of communication or information.

Traffickers commonly maintain control by restricting communication. This may include withholding access to interpreters or phones, acting as a "translator" to manipulate conversations, or providing false information about laws, immigration status, or consequences. Without independent and qualified language access, victims may believe they have no viable options for assistance or escape.

Limited language access also contributes to missed warning signs by healthcare providers, social service professionals, and law enforcement. Indicators of trafficking may go unnoticed when qualified interpreters are not used, when companions speak on behalf of individuals, or when victims cannot communicate privately or safely. Accessible communication enables professionals to ask trauma-informed questions and receive accurate information directly from potential victims.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals face additional risks, including limited access to emergency services, hotlines, and ASL-fluent advocates. Providing accessible services—such as qualified ASL interpretation, captioning, visual resources, and multilingual information—helps reduce barriers to reporting and support. Language access saves lives by breaking the silence and isolation on which human trafficking depends and by connecting victims to critical, life-saving resources.

Annual Open House

On November 15, 2024, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) hosted its first annual Open House. The event provided members of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities an opportunity to learn about State agencies and available resources, engage directly with agency representatives, and ask questions in an accessible and inclusive environment. The Open House also strengthened relationships between the Deaf community and State partners, promoted awareness of services and supports, and encouraged greater collaboration and trust.

In addition, the Open House celebrated Director Usherla DeBerry's first work anniversary, highlighting her leadership and the continued commitment of GODHH to inclusive engagement and accessibility. Invitations were distributed via a Google RSVP form, resulting in approximately 45 registrants, with 9 individuals attending in person.

Participating organizations and businesses included:

- Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM)
- Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT)
- Deaf Smile Project
- NAOBI-DC
- Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC)
- Governor's Office of Small, Minority & Women Business Affairs
- Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library (DCDL)
- Maryland Deaf Community Center (MDCC)
- Everyday Canvassing
- Non-Profit Organization for Deaf Community
- Rosemary's Fabulous Cakes
- Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP)
- Baltimore City Association of the Deaf (BCAD)
- Keystone Interpreting Solutions (KIS)
- Montgomery County Public Schools
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD)
- Howard County Association of the Deaf (HCAD)

During the Open House, participating organizations shared information about their programs and services that directly benefit Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities. Attendees learned about educational opportunities, accessibility and telecommunications services, health and wellness programs, employment support, and community engagement initiatives. This platform allowed organizations to exchange resources, strengthen partnerships, and highlight services that support the community's needs.

By combining the celebration of Director DeBerry's first work anniversary with community engagement, the event reinforced GODHH's commitment to inclusive communication, accessibility, and collaboration. The Open House successfully increased awareness of available services, fostered connections among stakeholders, and strengthened the network of organizations serving the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities.

Resources for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing

Across the State of Maryland, many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals encounter long-standing barriers that affect both employment and entrepreneurship. Inaccessible workplaces, limited access to education and training programs, and a lack of tailored business support have made it difficult for individuals to secure stable, well-paying jobs or to successfully launch and grow businesses. As a result, unemployment and underemployment continue to affect a large portion of the community, while Deaf and Hard of Hearing business owners often face compounded obstacles to sustainability and expansion.

Expanding the Deaf Ecosystem

The Deaf Ecosystem was developed to address challenges by strengthening economic opportunity from within the community. Rather than allowing resources, talent, and purchasing power to flow outward, the Ecosystem centers on reinvesting in Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, businesses, and organizations. Through collaboration, mentorship, workforce development, and business support, this initiative works to cultivate a connected economic network where community members actively uplift one another.

By encouraging local investment and supporting entrepreneurship and job growth, the Deaf Ecosystem helps build lasting financial stability. This approach leads to stronger businesses, increased employment opportunities, and greater retention of wealth within the community. Over time, this growing economic strength contributes to improved overall well-being and greater independence for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders.

The Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing plays an essential role in advancing the Deaf Ecosystem by serving as a central point of connection. The Office links current and aspiring business owners to state resources, including economic development initiatives, business assistance programs, funding opportunities, and grants. These efforts help ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals have equitable access to the tools and support needed to achieve long-term success.

Legislative Awareness Day 2024

On October 14, 2024, GODHH hosted Legislative Awards and Training at the Community College of Baltimore County.

(Photo from "Happy Birthday Governor Wes Moore - from the Deaf Community" Video).

Awardees Honoring Exceptional Support During the Office and GODHH Director Transition:

Blaise Delahoussaye, *Metro-Washington Association of the DeafBlind*
Shayna Unger, *Deaf Mountain Climber*
Scott Lehmann, *Deaf Mountain Climber*
Dr. Thomas Horejes, *Early Hearing and Detection Intervention Board*
Keystone Interpreting Solutions Agency
Natalie Ennis, *Ennis Captioning*
Al Sonnenstrahl, *Deaf Leadership and History*
Linda Stoltz, *Maryland Deaf Community Center*
Elke Pieters, *Howard County Association of the Deaf*
Two Rivers Community, Crofton Location
- *Heidi Burghardt & John Olumoya*
- *Tammy & Steve Weiner*
- *Diane & Dillip Emmanuel*
- *Mark & Patti Mace*
- *Ted & MaryPat Lord*

Dr. Rebecca Minor, *Community College of Baltimore County*
Dr. Ellen Schaefer-Salins, *Salisbury University POC*
Salisbury University President Carolyn Lepre
David Bahar, *Telecommunication Access of Maryland*

Alice Hagemeyer, *Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action*
Senator Benjamin Brooks
Delegate Harry Bhandari
Maryland Association of the Deaf
Tina Joyner
Jacob Leffler

2024 Awardees

Maryland
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Ted & MaryPat Lord, Tammy & Steve Weiner, Diane & Dillip Emmanuel, Mark & Patti Mace, and Heidi Burghardt & John Olumoya

State Workshops and Trainings

Statewide Training:

Statewide training led by the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) is essential to ensure consistent, equitable, and accessible services for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals across Maryland. As a coordinating office, GODHH provides subject-matter expertise on language access, communication accessibility, and Deaf culture, helping agencies understand their responsibilities and apply best practices in real-world settings. Statewide training reduces inconsistencies in service delivery, strengthens compliance with state and federal accessibility requirements, and equips staff with the knowledge and tools needed to respond effectively and respectfully to diverse communication needs. By offering standardized training, GODHH supports improved outcomes, builds agency capacity, and promotes a unified, statewide approach to access, inclusion, and quality public service.

Deaf Culture Awareness Month

Deaf culture represents a shared identity, language, and way of life shaped by Deaf individuals who use sign language and value visual communication. It is defined not by hearing loss alone, but by a combination of language, history, social norms, and shared experiences. Central to this culture is American Sign Language (ASL), a complete language with its own grammar. Communication is primarily visual, relying on hands, facial expressions, body language, and eye contact, making clear sight lines and proper lighting essential.

Many Deaf individuals view Deafness as a cultural identity rather than a disability. The capital "D" in Deaf signifies pride in Deaf language, history, and community. Shared values include gaining attention visually, maintaining eye contact, being direct and expressive, and prioritizing access and inclusion rather than framing needs as accommodations.

Community and belonging are central to Deaf culture and are fostered through schools, social organizations, community events, and online spaces. Storytelling, humor, and shared experiences strengthen community bonds, and Deaf elders and leaders are respected for their guidance. Deaf culture is also rooted in advocacy, including recognition of sign language, access to education and employment, and communication rights such as interpreters and captioning. Institutions like schools for the Deaf and Gallaudet University have been key in preserving language and culture.

The Deaf community is diverse, including individuals with varied communication methods, backgrounds, and identities. Understanding Deaf culture helps professionals in healthcare, education, and public services communicate effectively, improve access, and build trust.

Deaf Culture Month, observed each September, celebrates Deaf history, language, and identity while raising awareness of access, equity, and inclusion. The month commemorates milestones such as the opening of the American School for the Deaf on September 10, 1817, and the signing of Gallaudet University's charter on September 8, 1864. It provides an opportunity to educate the public, challenge misconceptions of deafness as solely a disability, and highlight the ongoing need for language access, qualified interpreters, captioning, accessible technology, and inclusive policies.

On September 30, 2024, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH), along with several organizations supporting the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community, received a citation from Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller in recognition of their contributions and service. The event also included special recognition of Alice Hagemeyer for her longstanding and impactful contributions to the Deaf community.

Photos from Deaf Culture Ceremony in the Governor's Reception Room:

Internal Training:

Internal training provided by the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) supports organizations in building the knowledge and capacity needed to effectively serve Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals within their specific operational contexts. These trainings are tailored to an organization's roles, systems, and service environments, allowing staff to better understand communication access requirements, appropriate use of language services, and Deaf cultural considerations as they relate to daily practice. By delivering targeted internal training, GODHH helps organizations address gaps, improve compliance, reduce reliance on ad hoc solutions, and strengthen staff confidence. This approach promotes more consistent, accessible, and responsive service delivery while supporting organizational accountability and improved outcomes for the communities served.

Johns Hopkins

Director DeBerry presented two presentations for Johns Hopkins Hospital in order to spread awareness about language needs, resources, and overall access for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals.

Lunch and Learn Participation Summary:

Part 1 (9/25/24)	Part 2 (4/29/25)
Registered: 196 staff	Registered: 191 staff
Attended: 88 staff	Attended: 70 staff
Attendance rate: 44.9%	Attendance rate: 36.6%

Trend Overview:

Registration remained strong and consistent across both sessions. Attendance declined by 18 participants in Part 2, representing an 8.3 percentage-point decrease in the attendance rate. Despite the lower turnout, both sessions reached a substantial audience with interest in Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) access and language services.

Learning Objectives Addressed:

The sessions addressed the diversity of language needs within the Deaf community, including differences in communication preferences. Participants were introduced to available language service resources for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and explored ways to improve access to appropriate resources through scenario-based learning that encouraged practical, real-world application.

Language Services Goals:

The sessions supported the goal of cultivating a world-class Language Services program by promoting the consistent delivery of high-quality language services. Emphasis was placed on streamlining access to services, so care teams can provide timely and appropriate resources, ensuring individuals with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency (LEP) have equal access to health care. The sessions also reinforced the importance of effective communication in achieving quality outcomes and excellent patient care.

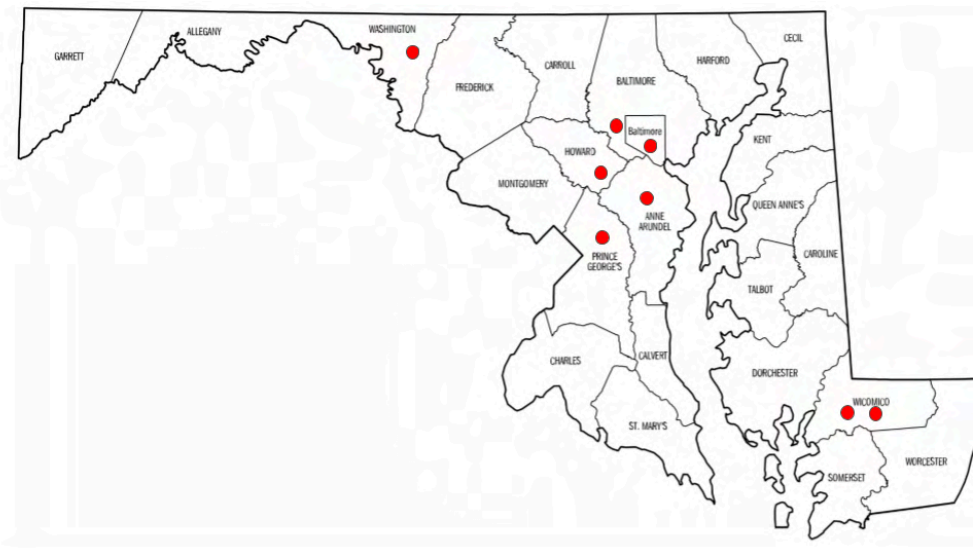
Topics Covered:

Presenters explained Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) and when its use is most appropriate, reviewed the role of a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) and circumstances in which a CDI may be required, and shared staff resources with step-by-step guidance on requesting in-person sign language interpreters. Real-world scenarios were discussed, including registering new patient appointments, scheduling interpreters for outpatient clinics, and planning

interpreter services in advance of appointments. The sessions also covered the appropriate use of Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) and reviewed various communication aids available to support effective patient communication.

Town Hall Meetings

Town halls are a powerful way for the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing(GODHH) to stay connected to the communities we serve. These open forums create space for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing residents to share their experiences, raise concerns, ask questions, and offer solutions directly to our team. Through in-person and virtual town halls, we listen to community voices in real time and gain valuable insight into the challenges people face across the state. In accordance with its statutory responsibilities, the Office shall hold at least two public town hall meetings each year to receive public comment on the quality of State services and programs affecting Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, the functions and operations of the Office, and any other issues that affect Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individual.



These conversations help guide our priorities, shape our programs, and strengthen our advocacy efforts. Town halls also build trust by fostering open dialogue, transparency, and collaboration, ensuring that community members feel heard, valued, and actively involved in the work being done on their behalf. Ultimately, town halls help GODHH better fulfill its mission to promote

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accessibility, equity, and inclusion for all Marylanders who are Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing.

October 28, 2024	Deafnet Association 551 Jefferson Street, Hagerstown, MD 21740
November 18, 2024	Deaf Independent Living Association (DILA) 806 Snow Hill Rd, Salisbury, MD 21804

Notes from these meetings are available here: https://odhh.maryland.gov/godhh-town-hall-notes/
The GODHH statute is available here:
https://odhh.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2020/09/ODHH-Statute.pdf

DILA Town Hall Photo:

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Deafnet Town Hall Photos:

Customer Inquiries

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) receives a wide range of customer inquiries from Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and hearing individuals seeking information, referrals, and assistance. In FY25, the office received 507 inquiries via email, videophone, or in person. The majority of inquiries relate to housing and nursing home access, requests for legal resources or referrals to attorneys, and questions about obtaining interpreters or other communication access services. Additional inquiries frequently involve mental health and addiction treatment services, employment-related concerns, DeafBlind services, and assistance with assistive technology. Through these inquiries, GODHH serves as a central point of contact, providing guidance, referrals, and information to help individuals navigate systems, access appropriate resources, and address barriers to communication and services.

Videos Created by GODHH

During the reporting period of January 1, 2024, through June 30, 2024, the GODHH Outreach Interpreter Manager manually added captioning for one video featuring Governor Wes Moore. The video, produced for his birthday on October 15, 2024, featured messages from members of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities across Maryland and was shared across GODHH social media platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (X).

Managing for Results

Managing for Results (MFR) is a process that focuses on planning, measuring performance, and budgeting to make sure resources are being used effectively, and state programs are improving.

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing collects data on issues affecting the community in the state of Maryland. This includes information from the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD), the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD), the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS), the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), the Maryland Deaf Cultural Library (DCDL), and the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR).

Annual MFR reports from the office, other departments, and agencies can be found at https://dbm.maryland.gov/Pages/MFR_StrategicPlansFY25.aspx.

Staff

Usherla DeBerry	*Director*	2023 - Present
Laura Lugar	*Executive Assistant*	2024 - 2025
Tanéa Brown	*Outreach Interpreter Manager*	2024 - Present
Diamon Halliburton	*Administrative Assistant*	2024- Present

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From left to right: Diamon Halliburton, Tanéa Brown, Laura Lugar, and Usherla DeBerry at a Human Trafficking awareness event held at the 50+ Center in Columbia, Maryland.

We Are GODHH