Maryland

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

MARYLAND ADVISORY COUNCIL ON DEAF, DEAFBLIND, AND HARD OF HEARING

WELCOME KIT

2026

As of September 2026

The Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (GODDBHH)

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1. WELCOME TO THE COUNCIL

Welcome to the Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MACDDBHH).

Thank you for your willingness to serve Maryland's Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities. Your participation helps bring community experiences, expertise, and perspectives into conversations about state services, policies, programs, and accessibility.

Council members bring different backgrounds and experiences. By working together, members can identify concerns, share information, encourage collaboration, and advise the Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.

This Welcome Kit is intended to help you understand the Office, the Council, your role as a member, and resources available to support your participation.

2. ABOUT THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

Office Name

The Office's updated name is the Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (GODDBHH). It was formerly known as the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH).

House Bill 439, enacted as Chapter 655 of the Acts of 2026, renames the Office and Advisory Council. The Act is scheduled to take effect October 1, 2026. This kit is dated September 2026; the new names and statutory structure are presented in anticipation of that effective date.

Mission and Purpose

The Office works to promote the general welfare of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders by addressing policy gaps, providing expertise, supporting coordination, and helping improve access to resources and services.

The Office works with state agencies, community organizations, service providers, and other partners on issues affecting the communities it serves.

Office Responsibilities

- Providing expertise on issues affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders.
- Supporting coordination among state agencies, organizations, and community partners.
- Identifying policy and service gaps.
- Promoting access to information, resources, programs, and services.

- Supporting community engagement and sharing information about relevant state initiatives.
- Collaborating with partners on communication access, inclusion, and participation.

Office Leadership and Staff

Director: Usherla DeBerry

Additional staff:

Administrative Assistant - Diamon Halliburton, Outreach Interpreter Manager - Tanéa Brown

3. ABOUT THE MARYLAND ADVISORY COUNCIL

Official Name

The Council's updated name is the Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MACDDBHH). It was formerly known as the Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH).

Purpose

The Council serves in an advisory capacity to the Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing. It provides a forum for community and agency perspectives on issues affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders.

Council Membership

Under Chapter 655 of the Acts of 2026, the Council consists of 19 members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate:

State Agency Representation

The Council includes one representative from each of the following:

- Maryland State Department of Education
- Maryland Department of Health
- Department of Human Services
- Maryland Department of Transportation
- Maryland Commission on Civil Rights
- Maryland Department of Labor
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Maryland School for the Deaf
- Maryland Department of Aging
- Maryland Department of Disabilities

General Public Representation

The Council includes nine members from the general public, selected from different geographic areas of Maryland. These seats include:

- Five Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.
- One private citizen with special knowledge or expertise relating to services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.
- One parent of a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child.
- One representative from a private agency providing services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.
- One person with special knowledge or expertise relating to services for DeafBlind individuals.

At least five Council members must be Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals. Review the enacted statute and current appointment records when confirming the roster and categories.

4. COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Member Participation

Council members are encouraged to:

- Attend and participate in Council meetings.
- Share relevant community perspectives and expertise.
- Review meeting materials and provide thoughtful feedback.
- Identify issues, service gaps, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Communicate with the communities and organizations they represent, as appropriate.
- Work respectfully and collaboratively with fellow members and the Office.
- Follow applicable laws, Council bylaws, and meeting procedures.

Terms and Appointments

Council members are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Existing appointments and terms continue in accordance with applicable law. Chapter 655 provides that the renaming does not itself affect the term of an appointed member. Contact the Office with questions about appointments, vacancies, or terms.

Council Officers

Chair: Marcus Smith

Vice Chair: Mark Tesoro

Secretary: Kathleen Kramer

Bylaws - https://odhh.maryland.gov/macdhh-bylaws/

5. COUNCIL MEETINGS AND PARTICIPATION

Regular Meetings

The Council meets regularly to discuss issues affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders and to provide advice and feedback to the Office.

Meeting schedule: Quarterly meetings. First or Second Friday pending if the holiday conflicts with date. Months of meetings January, March, June, September, December.

The Office will share meeting dates, agendas, materials, and participation instructions with members and community.

Meeting Preparation

Members are encouraged to:

- Review the agenda and materials before the meeting.
- Identify questions or concerns for discussion.
- Notify the appropriate contact if an accommodation is needed.

- Participate respectfully and allow others an opportunity to contribute.
- Follow the meeting chair's instructions and applicable procedures.

Public Participation and Town Halls

The Office may host town halls and other community engagement opportunities to hear from Maryland residents and share information about issues affecting the communities served. Town halls provide opportunities for community members to raise concerns, share experiences, and offer feedback.

Current meeting dates, agendas, minutes, and town hall information should be posted on the Office's website.

Bylaws and Procedures

Council members should refer to the current MACDDBHH bylaws for information about officer duties, meeting procedures, committees, and other Council operations.

Current bylaws: https://odhh.maryland.gov/macdhh-bylaws/

6. OFFICE RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY INFORMATION

The Office provides information and connects individuals with resources relating to Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing access and services. Resources may include information about:

- Communication access and accommodations
- Assistive technology
- Education and employment
- Housing and independent living
- Health and behavioral health
- Telecommunications and relay services
- Community organizations and service providers
- Legislation and state government activities

For current resources, visit the Office's website and resource pages.

Legislation

The Office monitors legislation that may affect Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders and shares information about relevant hearings, updates, and legislative activity. The Office provides information to support community awareness and participation. Information about a bill should not be interpreted as an endorsement unless the Office expressly states otherwise.

Community Directory

The Office may provide or link to directories of organizations, businesses, and services relevant to the communities it serves. Consult the current website for the most up-to-date directory and instructions for submitting information.

7. DEAF, DEAFBLIND, AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Understanding the Community

Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing people have diverse identities, experiences, languages, and communication preferences. Some people identify culturally as Deaf. Others may identify as Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, late-deafened, or in other ways. Individuals may use sign language, spoken language, written communication, assistive technology, or a combination of approaches.

Do not assume that all people communicate in the same way. Ask each person what works best for them.

Deaf Culture

Deaf culture can include shared language, identity, history, traditions, values, art, and community experiences. American Sign Language (ASL) is a complete visual language with its own grammar and structure. It is not simply English translated into signs. Deaf communities are diverse, and individuals may have different relationships with Deaf culture and the broader community.

DeafBlind Community

DeafBlind people have combined hearing and vision differences, with a wide range of communication and access needs. Some people may use tactile signing, close-vision signing, large-print materials, assistive technology, or other individualized methods. Ask the individual about their preferred communication and access arrangements.

8. COMMUNICATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Respect Individual Communication Preferences

When communicating with a Deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing person:

- Ask how they prefer to communicate.
- Speak directly to the person rather than only to an interpreter.
- Do not assume everyone uses ASL or reads lips.
- Provide written, visual, or other communication support when requested or appropriate.
- Allow time for interpretation and turn-taking.
- Identify yourself before speaking in group settings.
- Avoid speaking over others or changing topics abruptly.
- Confirm that the person has access to the information being shared.

Meetings and Accommodations

The Office works to make its meetings and activities accessible. Accommodation arrangements should be coordinated in advance whenever possible. Depending on individual needs, access may include qualified ASL interpreters, real-time captioning, assistive listening technology, tactile interpreting, accessible electronic materials, or other individualized accommodations.

Members should contact the Office as early as possible to discuss accommodation needs.

9. CONTACT INFORMATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Governor’s Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing

Address: 100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD 21032

Telephone: (443) 453 - 5761 (VideoPhone)

Email: gov.oddbhh@maryland.gov

Website: https://odhh.maryland.gov/

Stay Connected

For current announcements, resources, meeting information, and community updates, visit the Office’s website and verified social media accounts.

Social media: Website | Facebook | Instagram | X | YouTube

IMPORTANT NOTE

This Welcome Kit is an informational resource and does not replace the Maryland Code, Council bylaws, official appointment documents, or applicable state policies. When a summary in this kit differs from controlling law or an official governing document, the law or official document takes precedence.

Last updated: September 2026

Prepared by: Governor’s Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing