

## DDBHH Seat #6

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to Usherla, me, DDBHH, md.ddbhh.03, DDBHH, md.ddbhh.05, DDBHH, DDBHH,  
Blake, Mary, Heidi, Marcus, Samantha, Bridgetta, V, Diamon, Tanéa, Laura, Leo



Hi - I have thoughts that I'd like to share with you all. as I have attended three meetings so far and learned a lot.

**Mass Commission - 3/13/25** - The first meeting was BJ wood and Al Sonnestrahl - both have served on mass commissions for the deaf and hard of hearing sharing their experience and history behind it all. I was inspired.

**Dept of Aging - 3/27/25**- secondly dept of aging - mark t and darrin smith from DHS. I can't believe how little the budget department of aging works with and it should be a bit more to be able to serve more of deaf senior citizens, especially transportation.

4 goals of Wellness

1. Longevity Eco System with objectives
2. Access to affordable housing
3. Optical health and wellness
4. Mobility

These are the dept's plans for the next 10 years.

- Children who are 5 yo today are anticipating to live to over 100 yo. We need system planning for this.
- The dept of aging only receives 5% of the state budget. A good size of the budget goes to the dept of health.
- The Sept of aging tries to build relationships, be creative and offer care.
- DOA has 19 offices across the state (not necessarily by county).
- Provides referrals to other agencies.

- DOA serves seniors AND some people with disabilities.
- Some DOA offices will offer more or less services compared to other offices depending on the population.
- Samantha pointed out there is no central location for deaf & hh people to receive assistance when they need it.
- Transportation (affordable transportation) is a huge problem. Mark suggested service providers consider including transportation as a part of their services.

### **Recommendations -**

1. If there is a commission, partnering or collaboration with the dept of aging will be needed.
2. Consider having a dept of aging representative on the commission's board or committee.

**DHS-3/27/25** - Darrin is the ONLY DHS signing supervisor of case managers in the state of maryland.

- There is a deaf case manager in Frederick. We need MORE deaf case managers and support. DHS often focuses more on family-related services. Darrin supervises 8 case managers (a case manager's case load is approx. 15-20).
- There's no waiting list. Darrin processes approx. 20-25 Deaf applications a month, where say in Howard County, they may have 100 senior applications with 15 deaf senior applications.
- It can take up to a year to get a case manager trained for their position.
- There are 745,000 deaf people in PG County alone.
- Requesting interpreters can be challenging as individuals need to be interviewed within 1 week but we need at least 2 weeks in advance to request interpreters.

**Recommendations** - Darrin recommended there be more Deaf case managers hired. Deaf persons needing a case manager (a referral), we can email Darrin. Write in concerns as they are read.

Because I shared with darrin that washington county social services where their DHS is headquartered does NOT have VRI or offer interpreters in person or even have a signing case manager like darrin available! so i can imagine that is happening in other counties. I think Frederick county added another but that's not the point, we need more support across Maryland

and we can do better and it would offer MORE employment opportunities for deaf/deaf blind /deaf plus community really.

**Reviewed Websites** - This morning I decided to take a look at state of Maryland websites, links and such and compare with other states... so far we have 38 commissions in their states per nad and national association state agencies website. Hopefully more states will follow. I noticed some of their websites are not updated and not secure to visit, even Colorado hasn't updated their website since 2014. Our state website is confusing to use honestly. There's no one page for all of the things deaf.hh.db like other states have. With technology, information & referral and such. Also there is no deaf representative for Maryland State Dept of Education (MSDE). No unit for deaf education on MSDE website like DORS has a deaf/hard of hearing unit on their website.

West VA commission for the deaf and hard of hearing have a really nice and clear website. Georgia is impressive as well. Type in Google, state commissions for the deaf and 38 of these will come up.

**Considerations** - I know MDAD plans to submit a bill for a commission but I haven't seen it and how much money will this involve due to the current climate, the governor already has proposed cuts even to the LISS which is a shame cause that is a grant supporting autistic community possible will impact deaf autistic children. Right now I don't know if you all heard about cuts to the Minnesota deaf community. I think the deaf service center has been cut. It is concerning so that's something to keep in mind.

Other states have commissions under either dept of health and dept of disabilities or just under the state. So it doesn't really matter as long as it's under the state of Maryland. But I noticed we already have Maryland Commission on Disabilities Board under MDOD so why are we duplicating this? We have to consider it to be financially effective too.

**Suggestion** - My suggestion is to possibly rename from the governor's office for the deaf to Office of the Deaf and hh... and revamp the website making it better navigate to places where we should go to get our info and resources. How much money will that cost us if we revamp our website? Instead of hiring deputy or compliance officers, we could hire case managers and collaborate with other agencies in Maryland.

Personally I am a Washington County resident and I don't like what I'm seeing and its 2025, we can do better really, we don't have a deaf case manager at Washington Co DORS, we don't have a deaf case manager at DHS, we don't have one stop center where we can receive electronics

like fire alarms, alarm clocks, such. and we still have unqualified non-certified interpreters. We have deafnet which is a non profit organization with no benefits to the community.

So we have a lot of work in a little time and I hope to see more of you involved in meetings. Like BJ Wood said, we gotta think out of the box.