

Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



Annual Report



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FY23

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Governor

Wes Moore



Lieutenant Governor

Aruna Miller



Interim Director

Kate Breen

Governor's Letter

Dear Marylanders,

I am pleased to present the Fiscal Year 2023 report from the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH). As a state, we are committed to ensuring that all Marylanders, regardless of ability, have equal access to opportunities, services, and resources. The GODHH plays a pivotal role in making this vision a reality for those who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.

In Fiscal Year 2023, the GODHH continued its important work of promoting awareness, improving access to services, and advocating for the rights of individuals with hearing loss. Through partnerships, innovative programs, and strong community engagement, we have made significant progress in breaking down barriers and nurturing inclusivity across Maryland.

Key accomplishments for FY 2023 include expanding access to communication tools, enhancing educational initiatives, and advocating for better policies and practices that support the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. The ODHH has also worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by individuals with hearing loss, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met.

I am proud of the work that the GODHH has done and continues to do to create a more inclusive Maryland, and I look forward to seeing the continued positive impact of their efforts in the years to come.

Thank you for your continued support of this critical work.

Sincerely,

Governor Wes Moore

GODHH Acting Director's Letter

Dear Friends,

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is proud to present our annual report for fiscal year 2023.

In the past year, we saw the end of former Governor Larry Hogan and a new era in Maryland governance, with Governor Wes Moore. Another sign of the new era is the departure of former GODHH Director Kelby Brick, who was appointed in the beginning of the former administration. The search for a new Director who will reflect the new administration's agenda.

At the beginning of FY24, former Director Brick attended the annual National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, followed by the National Association of the Deaf in Orlando, Florida.

We welcomed the DC Mayor's Office of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MODDBHH), the newest office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing state offices in the country and its inaugural director Kari Cooke.

In January and February 2023, the Behavioral Health Administration hosted a series of five virtual stakeholder meetings with four regions on available state services for behavioral health and the goal of identifying and reducing current gaps in services.

MD received top national ranking for ASL access to official state government COVID-19 press briefings: www.nad.org/ranking-report-of-states-for-asl-access-during-covid-19-briefings/. For the first time since the pandemic, GODHH has actively organized and participated in town halls, oftentimes partnering with the Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) from Hyattsville to Baltimore to Frederick and Hagerstown.

We are continuing our projects on linguistic awareness and policy improvements for individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing throughout the state, including the Department of Transportation and Motor Vehicles Administration.

We look forward to working with the Moore administration for the next four years, working to make a better place for 1.2 million Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to live, work, raise a family, and retire.

Thank you, Katherine Breen

Governor's Coordinating Offices

The Governor's Coordinating Offices serve as direct agents of the governor, aligning tasks and priorities with the governor's agenda. Each office practices specific expertise, allowing for close collaboration, coordination, and information sharing with agencies and other entities across the state. In turn, the governor is provided with access to real-time knowledge of Marylanders' needs.

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 Service and Volunteerism

The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention

The Governor's Office of Homeland Security

To learn more about the Governor's Offices and other agencies, please visit gco.maryland.gov
https://www.maryland.gov/pages/agency_directory.aspx

<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/08conoff/coord/html/00list.html>

Responsibilities

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was established in October 2001 through Chapter 537 of the Acts of the 2001 General Assembly. In accordance with State Government Article section 9-2407 of the Annotated Code of Maryland, the office promotes the general welfare of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals by addressing policy gaps, providing expertise related to Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues, and facilitating the ability to access resources and services. The office believes that all constituents who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing should have equal and full access to resources, services, and opportunities in all aspects of community life through the provision of appropriate accommodations.

Starting January 1, 2025, sign language interpreters in Maryland must be licensed. Following the passing of the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act in 2023, GODHH will oversee the licensing process, ensuring interpreters meet professional standards in ASL and other visual communication modes. This includes evaluating qualifications, approving continuing education, and providing workshops. New staff positions will be added to support this initiative, strengthening interpreter services across the state.

Priorities

GODHH's priorities include the following:

EXPANDING THE DEAF ECOSYSTEM

Expanding the economic mobility of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, organizations and businesses

ENSURING SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER QUALITY

Addressing fraudulent and unqualified interpreters in the state of Maryland.

IMPROVING STATE SERVICES FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING MARYLANDERS

Collaborating with state services, agencies, and programs to improve efficiency and quality of services.

Expanding the Deaf Ecosystem

Due to systemic barriers in society ranging from inaccessibility to limited educational and training opportunities, the ability to secure long-term, well-paying employment has been difficult for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders. More than 80% of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population are either underemployed or unemployed. Deaf and Hard of Hearing business owners have also faced societal barriers, hindering their ability to maintain and expand businesses.

Building the Deaf Ecosystem - a system designed to empower the economic mobility of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, organizations and businesses - is critical in combating the pervasive underemployment and unemployment that many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals experience. As commonly experienced within many other minority groups, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community's collective wealth and opportunities are often exploited and dispersed into the larger society. Because resources tend to leave the community, Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals are disempowered with severe negative impacts on their socio-economic status.

To empower the economic mobility and purchasing power of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, the Deaf Ecosystem's fundamental approach is to retain and harness the collective socio-economic power among the community's individuals, organizations, and businesses through collaboration and support. This includes fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial environment that empowers Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to realize their potential without any barriers.

A strong Deaf Ecosystem will lead to increased social and economic clout from the retention and expansion of jobs, resources, and wealth. The community's increased influence is leveraged to support the community in turn, creating a synergistic effect. The synergy leads to more healthy, productive, and empowered Deaf and Hard of Hearing constituents. Learn more at odhh.maryland.gov/deaf-ecosystem.

GODHH, as a clearinghouse, provides existing state resources on services that cater to the needs of current and aspiring business owners such as economic zones and identifying grants.

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Business Owners

As of FY23, Maryland is home to more than 90 businesses owned and operated by Deaf and Hard of Hearing people who are actively contributing to the Deaf Ecosystem in Maryland.

To advance support for Maryland's Deaf and Hard of Hearing entrepreneurs and small business owners, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing regularly meets with them and makes visits at incubators and community events. The office also developed a video series featuring Maryland Deaf Ecosystem spotlights that are shared via social media to inspire patronage for these businesses.

To share resources and connect business owners with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Maryland at large, GODHH maintains and updates a directory of Maryland Deaf and Hard of Hearing owned businesses at odhh.maryland.gov/directory/.

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Employees & Job Seekers

To ensure that all Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders have an equal footing in employment, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shares key state employment resources, including those from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), Telecommunication Access of Maryland (TAM), Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD), and Maryland Department of Disabilities (DoD), the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), and Deaf Culture Digital Library (DCDL).

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing encourages state agencies to hire Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees and contractors, especially those that serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. A part of this includes emphasizing cultural and linguistic competence and highlighting specific expertise or skill sets that have been historically been undervalued by employers. This has resulted in significantly more job postings that require ASL fluency or that certain positions be filled by Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals. Several postings in the past include the Director of Maryland Relay, Superintendent of the Maryland School for the Deaf, the DCDL Coordinator, correctional officials at the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and the Maryland Relay Manager. Many of these postings have since been filled, but DPSCS continues to seek Deaf and ASL fluent correctional officials to work with Deaf inmates.

These initiatives have contributed to the reduction of unemployment rates in Maryland. Such statistics, including the [2022 Managing for Results Report](#) show that the Deaf Ecosystem is working.

Ensuring Sign Language Interpreter Quality

THE NEED FOR CERTIFIED INTERPRETERS

As required by state and federal law, private and public entities must provide qualified interpreters and other accommodations (such as real-time captioning) for Deaf and Hard of Hearing constituents. The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing advises entities to use interpreters who are certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), which sets the minimum national standards for interpreting.

Certification of sign language interpreters is extremely important to help protect entities from liability exposure and miscommunication between both parties. Certification also allows for appropriate and ethical access for consumers. Entities have the right to seek bids from different interpreting service agencies in Maryland, visit <https://odhh.maryland.gov/sbsli-board-members/>. The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has promoted the growth and use of the Deaf interpreter profession by ensuring that Deaf interpreters are used in state emergency broadcasts in Maryland, the Governor's State of the State address, open public official meetings, situations that involve the mental health setting, and meetings that involve children or DeafBlind constituents. Native or near-native fluency in various American Sign Language (ASL) dialects is critical to ensure cultural and linguistic competence. In many settings, Deaf interpreters are the most qualified people to provide high-quality services because ASL is their primary and native language.

CENTRALIZED INTERPRETING FUND STUDY

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has conducted research on ways to increase fiscal responsibility and improve the efficiency and quality of sign language interpreting services within state agencies in Maryland. The office worked with the Department of Budget and Management to create a new comptroller code for all state agencies to use to record their expenditure and request activity on sign language interpreting services.

The standard use of a Designated Object Line code 0834 (Sign Language Interpreter Services) began in FY18 to enable an accurate assessment of cost savings and aid in the fiscal evaluation of establishing a centralized source for state procurement of sign language interpreter services. Preliminary findings indicate the potential for cost-savings under a centralized budget while making the state government more efficient and responsive. The office continues to monitor this code to make budget decisions and recommendations for various agencies.

ADDRESSING INTERPRETING QUALIFICATIONS

GODHH receives and helps address complaints and concerns about unqualified and fraudulent sign language interpreters from constituents and businesses across Maryland. Unqualified and fraudulent interpreters in courts, government, schools, hospitals, and many other settings can cause significant harm to Deaf and Hard of Hearing constituents by failing to convey information. This leads to deprivation of knowledge, miscommunication, and isolation from the community at large.

To ensure equitable communication and language accessibility for all Deaf and Hard of Hearing constituents in Maryland, GODHH monitors information on fraudulent practices involving unqualified sign language interpreters and refers constituents to the MCCR and OHCQ for follow-up.

FY20, the Maryland legislature asked GODHH to provide recommendations that may help protect Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals from fraudulent and unqualified interpreters. An ASL video recap and complete response is also available at odhh.maryland.gov/JCR2020

FY21, GODHH released a survey to collect data on unqualified interpreters and inform interpreting requirements in Maryland that will remain open for submissions until further instructed by legislation. The link to the survey is available at bit.ly/interpretingsurvey

STATE EMERGENCY BROADCASTS

In the past, Deaf and HoH constituents raised concerns about the absence of sign language interpreters during state emergency broadcasts. In FY16, GODHH developed and distributed a memorandum to media outlets in Maryland regarding the on-screen framing of the speaker and interpreter, which is still in use today as a Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) team is now regularly included for many of Governor's broadcasts. This memorandum can be found at www.odhh.maryland.gov/broadcasts

The Moore administration is learning to provide accessibility for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people by ensuring that State House press conferences are captioned and interpreted, including by qualified Deaf Interpreters.

Improving Statewide Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders

To improve the efficiency and quality of services provided to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders, GODHH collaborates with state programs and agencies on a daily basis, providing expertise to various advisory groups, boards, focus groups, and policy meetings.

EARLY LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND BILINGUALISM

Across the country, many Deaf and Hard of Hearing children show up to school with language delays or no language at all, putting them at a disadvantage that sometimes continues for the rest of their lives. Language deprivation is often the result of children not having access to learning ASL, which also limits their capacity to learn another language - including English.

Language deprivation is an ongoing issue at the local and national levels. Maryland's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Advisory Council, which comprises parents, professionals, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. GODHH Acting Director Kate Breen serves on the council, focusing on combating language deprivation by working to ensure that every family receives access to visual language services, early intervention programs, and access to language resources as soon as possible.

The council supports a program that aims to ensure that every baby born in Maryland receives a newborn hearing screening and that hearing status is identified at the earliest age possible - preferably by three months of age. The program also coordinates with providers statewide to help ensure that babies who are identified as Deaf or Hard of Hearing receive early intervention services - preferably by six months of age.

Given that most of Deaf and Hard of Hearing infants are born to hearing parents who often have very little to no knowledge or command of ASL, it is critical to develop strong support systems for families. A critical component of support is ensuring that parents are provided with accurate information. A common misconception is that ASL is a communication option rather than a bona fide language. Another misconception is that parents need to choose between ASL and English

even though data repeatedly shows that these options are not mutually exclusive. To help prevent language deprivation for most Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, it is necessary to provide them with access to both languages within months of birth.

GODHH assists the Maryland State Department of Education to expand the Hearing Aid and Language and Communication Video Loan Bank to include videos and resources to help families learn ASL to communicate with their children. To learn more, visit “[bit.ly/loan-bank](https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/hearingaidloanbank.aspx)” <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/hearingaidloanbank.aspx>

Partnerships

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Office works closely with MDH with several of its departments and programs, including the Behavioral Health Administration, Developmental Disabilities Administration, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention, and the Office of Health Care Quality.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

GODHH serves on the statewide Behavioral Health Administration Advisory Council and the Cultural and Linguistic Competence committee to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals are able to access quality behavioral health services.

In FY20, the CLCC approved a plan to address a severe lack of cultural and linguistic competency among providers within the behavioral and mental health fields. The BHA then began the prioritization of a CLCSP in order to improve the access and delivery of quality care and access for specific disorders. More information can be found [here](#).

Legislative Awareness Day 2022

The Legislative Awareness Day (LAD) is an annual event aimed at improving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community's awareness on legislative issues, as well as promoting conversations about issues affecting Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals.

The 2022 Legislative Awareness Day was held at 100 Community Place, where several members of the community were honored.

2022 LAD Honorees





MACDHH Meetings & Members

The Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was established in October 2001 to advise the Maryland Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Appointed by the Governor, the Council is led by a Chair and Vice Chair and comprises 18 members. Nine of these members represent State agencies and nine represent the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Community.

The FY23 members met on the following dates:

September 23, 2022

December 9, 2022

March 10, 2023

June 9, 2023

Members:

Chair: Michele Westfall

Cleveland Horton III, MCCR

Alena Troxel, MDH

Marion Marny Helfrich, MSDE

MDOT - Vacant

Allegra Hollins, DHCD

DHS- Vacant

MDOA- Vacant

Veronica Davila Steele, Citizen

Dr. Larry Gray, Citizen

Dawn Padon, Private Agency

Norma Moran, Citizen

Bo. A. Byun D.M.D., Citizen

Edwin Martinez Jr., DeafBlind

Kristen M. Patterson, MDL (DLLR)

Vicki Porter, Citizen

Fred S. Hartman, Citizen

Kate Breen, GODHH

State Board of Sign Language Interpreters

The State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) serves to oversee the creation of licensure of interpreters in the state of Maryland. This board was established in May of 2023. As stated in [House Bill 260](#), the board is to be composed of seven members.

The law states that of the seven members appointed by the Governor, each should represent different parts of the DDBHH and Interpreter community. One shall be a member of the Maryland Association of the Deaf. One shall be a DeafBlind Individual. One shall be a member of the Potomac Chapter of the Registry of the Interpreters for the Deaf and must hold a license from this organization. The last four members shall be determined by the board by regulation.

GODHH Staff is working diligently with the Appointments Office to fill these positions.

Town Hall Meetings

The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing hosts most of its town hall meetings after board meetings with the Maryland Advisory Council of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Town halls provide a space for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders to be heard. It is important for the community to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns regarding what Maryland has been doing or can do better for its residents.

Town Hall Meetings took place on these dates:

September 23, 2022

September 28, 2022

October 6, 2022

December 9, 2022

March 10, 2023

June 9, 2023

Managing for Results

Managing for Results 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's individuals in the state of Maryland. This includes information from the Maryland School for the Deaf, the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Department of Disabilities, the Maryland Department of Human Services, the Maryland Department of Health, the Maryland Deaf Cultural Library, and the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights.

Annual MFRs reports from the office and other departments and agencies can be found at dbm.maryland.gov/pages/managingresultsmaryland.

Staff

Kelby Brick Director 2015-2023

Kate Breen Policy Manager/Interim Director 2021- Present

Papal Sharmacharya, Communication & Policy Manager 2022–Present

In Memoriam



David Martin
June 9, 1966 ~
July 27, 2022



Marie Ann Campbell
December 2, 1956 ~
November 24, 2022