

# Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



## Annual Report July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024



## FY24

[gov.odhh@maryland.gov](mailto:gov.odhh@maryland.gov)

# Table of Contents

<b>Governor's Letter</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Director's Letter</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Governor's Coordinating Offices</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Responsibilities &amp; Priorities</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>New Director in Transition</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Statewide Inclusive Call Check Survey Journey</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Resources for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>State Board of Sign Language Interpreters</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2024 Legislative Session</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Town Hall Meetings</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Managing for Results</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Legislative Awareness Day 2023</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Staff</b>	<b>30</b>



**Governor**

Wes Moore



**Lieutenant Governor**

Aruna Miller



**Director**

Usherla DeBerry

# Letter from Governor Wes Moore

I am proud to present the Fiscal Year 2024 report from the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH). As your Governor, I am deeply committed to nurturing an inclusive and accessible Maryland, where all residents, including those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind, have the support and resources they need to thrive.

In FY 2024, the ODHH continued to build on its strong foundation. They focused on expanding opportunities for access and advocacy for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. We recognize the critical need to break down communication barriers and ensure full participation in all aspects of life. This year also marked an important leadership transition with the appointment of Usherla DeBerry as Director of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, bringing renewed vision and commitment to advancing this vital work.

The priorities for this year included advancing our efforts to expand access to technology and services, enhancing communication access in public spaces, and further integrating Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals into educational, employment, and community settings. We are also prioritizing partnerships with local organizations and service providers to ensure that every Marylander has access to the tools and support they need to succeed.

I am proud of the ODHH's continued work and look forward to seeing the positive impact these efforts will have throughout the state in the coming year.

Thank you for your ongoing support as we work to ensure a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable Maryland for all.

Sincerely,

Governor Wes Moore

# GODHH Director's Letter

Dear Colleagues and Partners,

It is my privilege to present the Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report for the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH). This year has marked a period of transition, growth, and strengthened commitment to ensuring that Marylanders who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing have equitable access to communication, resources, and opportunities throughout the state.

The Office continued to build meaningful partnerships and advance accessibility through active participation in statewide committees and workgroups, including the Behavioral Health Advisory Council (BHAC), Cultural and Linguistic Competency Committee (CLCC), Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network (DHHCAN), Maryland Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI), Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GATBR), Hearing Accessibility Advisory Board (HAAB), Program Advisory Committee (PAC), Social Work Workgroup, and the Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH). GODHH also maintained collaborative partnerships with the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) and the National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH) to ensure alignment with national best practices.

This fiscal year also marked a significant leadership transition. The Office welcomed new leadership and staff, including a Director, Executive Assistant, and Outreach Interpreter Manager, allowing for the restructuring of the team to better align with operational needs and statewide priorities. Prior to being sworn in, I met with all 18 Maryland Senators as part of the appointment process with Governor Wes Moore, ensuring that the Office's goals and direction were consistent with the Administration's vision and legislative priorities.

Under this new leadership, GODHH refined its mission and vision, grounded in the guiding principles of "Nothing about us without us" and the Moore-Miller Administration's commitment to "Leave no one behind." These values align with the Governor's priorities to make Maryland safer, more affordable, more competitive, a state that serves, and to uphold justice through initiatives such as the Cannabis Pardons Order.

The Office also advanced its policy and legislative work by preparing its first legislative initiative, the Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) bill, by engaging with key stakeholders including the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM), Maryland Nonprofits, Maryland Latinos Unidos, the Office of Service Coordination, the Standardizing Resources Workgroup, and the Interagency Disability Board State Plan. GODHH was also honored to be invited by the Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) to participate in their town hall, further strengthening the Office's partnership with the community.

A highlight of the year included a personal meeting with Governor Wes Moore and Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller who met with Deaf mountaineers Scott Lehmann and Shayna Unger to celebrate their achievements and exchange experiences. This event exemplified the Administration's commitment to visibility, inclusion, and representation across all areas of public life.

Looking ahead, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will continue to build on these achievements by expanding partnerships, advancing legislative and policy initiatives, and promoting full communication access for all Marylanders. Together, we remain steadfast in our mission to make Maryland a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable state for every resident.

Respectfully,

Usherla DeBerry  
Director  
Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

# Governor's Coordinating Offices

The Governor's Coordinating Offices function as extensions of the Governor, ensuring that initiatives and priorities are effectively implemented in alignment with the Administration's agenda. Each office brings specialized expertise, facilitating collaboration, coordination, and information exchange among state agencies and partner organizations. Through this structure, the Governor maintains timely and comprehensive insight into the needs and concerns of Maryland residents.

**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:

- <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/08conoff/coord/html/00list.html>
- [https://www.maryland.gov/pages/agency\\_directory.aspx](https://www.maryland.gov/pages/agency_directory.aspx)

# Responsibilities

Established in October 2001 under Chapter 537 of the Acts of the General Assembly, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) advances the welfare of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders in accordance with State Government Article §9-2407. The Office provides policy guidance, expertise, and coordination to ensure equitable access to state resources, services, and opportunities. Additionally, the Office seeks to improve access to communication, services, and programs; works with State and local agencies to ensure access to safety and emergency services; and strives to increase access to educational, health, and social opportunities.

The mission of this office is to represent the Governor, following the priorities of the Moore-Miller Administration, and promote equality and accessibility for Marylanders by providing expertise that enhances the general welfare of Maryland's Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents. The vision of success for our office is that all Marylanders who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing have equal access to resources, services, and opportunities for participation in all aspects of community life.

Beginning January 1, 2025, GODHH will oversee the implementation of the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023, which establishes licensure requirements for all sign language interpreters in the state. The Office will manage licensing, evaluate qualifications, and support professional development to strengthen interpreter standards and accessibility statewide.

# Priorities

GODHH's priorities align with the Moore-Miller Administration, which aims to make Maryland's economy more competitive, keep our communities safe, expand opportunity and support Maryland families, and make Maryland a state that serves.

Learn more about Governor Moore's Priorities Here: <https://priorities.maryland.gov/>

# New Director in Transition

Director Usherla DeBerry was hired in November 2023 and began serving as Acting Director of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) at that time. She was appointed by Governor Wes Moore as a 2023 recess appointee and served in an acting capacity pending Senate confirmation.

On November 29, 2023, Acting Director DeBerry met Governor Wes Moore and Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller for the first time. During this introductory meeting, they became acquainted, took photographs, and discussed the anticipated visit of Deaf mountaineers Scott Lehmann and Shayna Unger. The couple is known for climbing major peaks, including Mount Everest, Denali, and Kilimanjaro, and for using American Sign Language and assistive technology such as Garmin inReach to communicate during expeditions while educating others about accessibility in outdoor recreation.

The Governor later met with Deaf and Hard of Hearing mountaineers Scott Lehmann and Shayna Unger to recognize their historic achievements and engage in discussion about representation, access, and perseverance within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. The meeting emphasized the importance of inclusion, visibility, and removing barriers so Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals can pursue ambitious goals across all fields. The exchange also provided an opportunity for shared experiences and mutual learning, reflecting the administration's commitment to equity and opportunity for all Marylanders.

Secretary Tisha Edwards formally introduced Acting Director DeBerry to members of the Senate Executive Nominations Committee. On behalf of Acting Director DeBerry and the Office of Appointments, Secretary Edwards invited committee members to schedule meetings with her in advance of the confirmation hearing.

As part of the confirmation process, Acting Director DeBerry met with some senators, some of whom are noted as follows:

Senator James Rosapepe — Sunday, January 21, 2024

Senator Cory McCray — Wednesday, January 24, 2024

Senator Mary Beth Carozza — Friday, January 26, 2024

Senator Brian Feldman — Monday, January 29, 2024

Senator Nancy King — Wednesday, January 31, 2024

Senator Craig Zucker — Wednesday, January 31, 2024

Senator Charles Sydnor — Thursday, February 1, 2024

Senator Antonio Hayes — Thursday, February 1, 2024

To transition from Acting Director to Director, a favorable vote from the full Senate was required following review by the Executive Nominations Committee.

On Monday, February 12, 2024, Senator James Rosapepe, the residential representative, formally introduced Acting Director DeBerry during a Senate hearing. During this hearing, her appointment was confirmed, and congratulations were extended.

On March 1, 2024, Acting Director DeBerry received written notification from the Senate confirming approval of her appointment. Subsequently, on May 1, 2024, Director DeBerry was sworn into office and officially assumed the role of Director of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

More information found here:

<https://governor.maryland.gov/news/press/pages/governor-moore-announces-appointments-to-go-vernors-office-of-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-and-state-board-of-sign-language.aspx>

**The photo was taken on February 12, 2024, and shows Director DeBerry as she prepares for the hearing and the interpreters explaining the process:**



**Acting Director and Policy Manager meet the new Administration:**



**Scott Lehman and Shayna Unger meet Governor Wes Moore and Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller:**



**Acting Director Usherla DeBerry being sworn in by Governor Wes Moore:**



# Statewide Inclusive Call Check Survey Journey

## Senior Call Checks Overview

Maryland Senior Call Check is a daily safety and wellness program that supports older adults who live independently. Participants receive an automated phone call or text message every day at a pre-selected time between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Calls are made as close as possible to the participant's chosen one-hour time window.

If the participant does not answer the first call, the system makes up to two additional attempts. If there is still no response, the program contacts an alternate person designated during enrollment, such as an adult child, neighbor, relative, or other trusted individual who is encouraged to check on the participant.

If neither the participant nor the alternate responds after multiple attempts, local non-emergency services will be contacted to conduct a welfare check.

The program is open to all Maryland residents aged 60 or older who have access to a landline or cell phone, including TTY services.

## Inclusive Call Check Survey

In May 2024, an inclusive survey was conducted to assess the accessibility of the Senior Call Check survey for Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and individuals with hearing loss who are Maryland residents.

The survey launched on May 1, 2024. During the week of May 13th, Tiffany Wilson of Wilson Inclusive Solutions traveled throughout Maryland with Director DeBerry and Executive Director David Bahar to support members of the DDBHH community in completing the Inclusive Call Check Survey and to assist with data collection.

Survey Data Collection Journey (where we traveled):

- Monday: Data collection in the Western Region at the Allegany County Senior Center
- Tuesday: Data collection and luncheon with the Southern Maryland Region
- Wednesday: State meetings and a senior center luncheon in the Central Region (Frederick, Maryland)

- Thursday: Attendance at the Maryland Deaf Senior Citizen (MDSC) meeting
- Friday: Attendance at the Senior Summit open event in Queen Anne's County

## Survey Participation Methods

Eligible Maryland residents age 65 and older were able to complete the survey using a variety of accessible formats, including:

- Online (Google Forms): English, Spanish, and Chinese
- Telephone: English, Spanish, and TTY Relay (available 24/7)
- Videophone: American Sign Language (daily from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. EST)
- Paper and Accessible PDF: English, Spanish, and Chinese
- Alternative formats: Available upon request

## State Program Authority

Authorizing Statutes:

- State Finance and Procurement Article §3.5-701
- State Finance and Procurement Article §3.5-702

Regulations:

- Title 32, Subtitle 3, Chapter 5 of COMAR

Funding Statute:

- Human Services Article §7-806

## Accessibility Laws and Guidance

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794) – Disability access in programs
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794d) – Information technology accessibility
- 28 C.F.R. § 35.161(a) – Access for individuals who are deaf, Hard of Hearing, or speech impaired
- Title 14, Subtitle 33, Chapter 2 of COMAR – Non-visual access
- LEP.gov – Limited English Proficiency guidance

To learn more about the Senior Call Check program, visit:

<https://aging.maryland.gov/pages/senior-call-check.aspx>

To learn about the results of the Inclusive Senior Calls Check Survey:

Email Jonathan Jenkins, Senior Call Check Administrator at [jonathan.jenkins1@maryland.gov](mailto:jonathan.jenkins1@maryland.gov).

# Inclusive Senior Call Check Flyers and Survey

**Senior Call Check Program**

**Feedback Survey: Accessibility**

**Your Feedback is Valuable**

The Senior Call Check Program (SCC), provided through the state Department of Aging (DOA), offers free daily wellness checks through automated phone calls to Marylanders aged 65 and above who have a cell phone or traditional home phone. The DOA has engaged **Wilson Inclusive Solutions, LLC (WINS)**, an independent consulting firm, to collect feedback from participants and eligible residents regarding the accessibility of the SCC program from **5/1/24 to 5/31/24**. The goal is to evaluate the program and make recommendations for improvement.

Your input is crucial to help us understand how well the program serves you in providing access, and your insights will assist us in improving the SCC program for all participants.

We have created several ways for you to share your feedback about the program's accessibility. For more details, please see the back of this flyer for the various methods you can provide input. **Thank you for participating!**

**Context:** Accessibility in this document refers to ensuring that the program functions effectively for persons with disabilities, including those with hearing loss, deafness, speech disabilities, blindness, low vision, as well as individuals with limited English proficiency.

**Many Ways To Respond**

- **Phone:** Call our customer service team
- **Online:** Use the web link or QR code
- **Paper:** Go to our website or ask for a paper survey from the place where you obtained this flyer.

For more details, please see the back of this flyer

**Questions?**  
Visit [pxl.to/MarylandCall](http://pxl.to/MarylandCall)  
OR  
Call 1-800-866-3360  
Anytime, 24/7

**Feedback Methods**

**Paper**  
A printable form is available on our website, [pxl.to/MarylandCall](http://pxl.to/MarylandCall) or request one from the administrative staff at the location where this flyer is displayed.  
Please return it to:  
WINS, SCC Program Feedback, PO BOX 2814, La Grande, Oregon 97850

**Phone (English/Spanish/TTY Relay)**  
Call 1-800-866-3360 at anytime to take the survey over the phone with our customer service representatives.

**Videophone (American Sign Language)**  
For American Sign Language, use your videophone to call 689-303-6447 between noon and 6 pm Eastern Standard Time to take the survey with our signing customer service representatives.

**Online**  
Access the survey online and explore other options at: [pxl.to/MarylandCall](http://pxl.to/MarylandCall).

**In Person**  
We are attending multiple meetings and senior center lunches across Maryland. Event locations will be advertised online, through Maryland local senior centers, and via your county's Area Agency on Aging representative.

**Alternative Formats and Other Languages**  
This survey is currently available in Spanish and Chinese languages both online and by mail. It is also available in alternative formats for language and accessibility purposes. To request the survey in an alternative format or language, please contact us by emailing [Feedback@ChangeAccess.com](mailto:Feedback@ChangeAccess.com) or leave a message at 443-266-5111.

To learn more about WINS, visit: [www.ChangeAccess.com](http://www.ChangeAccess.com)



[pxl.to/MarylandCall](http://pxl.to/MarylandCall)

**Maryland Senior Call Check Program Accessibility Feedback Survey**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This accessibility survey is for the Senior Call Check (SCC) Program offered by Maryland's Department of Aging (DOA). **Accessibility** in this context refers to ensuring the program works well for individuals with hearing loss, deafness, speech disabilities, blindness, low vision, or limited English proficiency.

The DOA has hired **Wilson Inclusive Solutions, LLC (WINS)**, an independent consulting firm, to gather feedback from participants throughout May about the accessibility of the SCC program, evaluate it, and make recommendations.

This survey is for Maryland residents aged 65 and older. If you do not meet this criteria and would like to provide feedback, please use the contact information below to send us your comments.

For those who meet the criteria, after you complete it, please mail the survey to:  
WINS, SCC Program Feedback, PO BOX 2814, La Grande, Oregon 97850

For more information, call 1-800-866-3360 or visit: [pxl.to/MarylandCall](http://pxl.to/MarylandCall)

**Section 1: Survey Start**

1. Are you a Maryland resident aged 65 or older?  
 Yes (please continue to section 2)  
 No (STOP: do not complete this survey and see above)

**Section 2: General Information**

2. What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Before completing this survey, were you aware of the Maryland Senior Call Check Program?  
 Yes  
 No
4. Do you have any of the following types of phones or phone services? Check all that apply.  
 Traditional home phone or landline, with or without a TTY  
 Cell phone  
 Internet based phone service  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you currently using the call check service or used it in the past?  
 Yes, I am currently using or have used it (please continue to Section 3)  
 No, I have never used the service (please skip to section 4)

# Photos from Statewide Inclusive Call Check Survey Journey

## Photo from Waldorf Senior Center



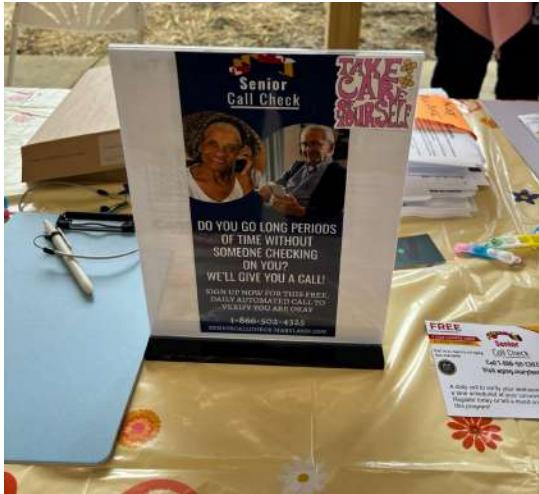
## Photos from Frederick, Maryland



## Photos from Maryland Deaf Senior Citizens Meeting



## Photos from Queen Anne's County



# Resources for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders

To promote equitable access to employment opportunities, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) shares essential state employment resources with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. These resources include programs and services provided by the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD), Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM), the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD), the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), and the Deaf Culture Digital Library (DCDL).

## Deaf Business Owners and Job Seekers

As of Fiscal Year 2023–2024, Maryland is home to more than 90 businesses owned and operated by Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. These enterprises play a vital role in strengthening and sustaining the state's Deaf ecosystem.

To enhance support for Deaf and Hard of Hearing entrepreneurs and small business owners, GODHH conducts regular meetings, site visits, and engagement at incubators and community events across the state. These efforts provide valuable insight into the needs of business owners and foster collaboration throughout Maryland's economic network.

In addition, GODHH maintains and regularly updates an online directory of Deaf and Hard of Hearing–owned businesses in Maryland, available at [odhh.maryland.gov/directory/](http://odhh.maryland.gov/directory/). This resource serves as an important tool for connecting business owners with both the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community and the broader Maryland public.

GODHH also continues to collaborate with state agencies to promote the recruitment and advancement of Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees and contractors, with particular emphasis on agencies that provide direct services to this population. This initiative underscores the importance of cultural and linguistic competence within the state workforce and highlights the value of specialized skills and lived experiences that have historically been underrepresented in employment practices.

As a result of these targeted efforts, an increasing number of state job postings now require American Sign Language (ASL) proficiency or specify that positions be filled by Deaf or Hard of Hearing candidates. Examples include the Director of Maryland Relay, Superintendent of the Maryland School for the Deaf, Statewide Coordinator of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services at

DORS, DCDL Coordinator, and correctional officer positions within the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS).

While several of these roles have been successfully filled, DPSCS continues its work with Deaf incarcerated individuals by hosting quarterly meetings and inviting participation from GODHH and the statewide ADA Coordinator to ensure ongoing compliance and accessibility.

# Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was created in October 2001 to help guide 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 FY24 members met on the following date:

January 8, 2024

Location: 100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD 21032

## **Members:**

**Chair:** Michelle Westfall

**Secretary:** Alyssa Dittmar

Cleveland Horton II, 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)

Vikki Porter, Citizen

Fred S. Hartman, Citizen

Katherine Breen, GODHH

More information on the board videos and minutes here: <https://odhh.maryland.gov/meetings/>

# Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act

The Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act was signed into law in May of 2023 by Governor Wes Moore. This board was established to oversee the licensing and regulation of the Sign Language Interpreters within the state of Maryland. The board, called the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, is to be composed of seven members: One MDAD representative, one PCRID representative, one DeafBlind representative, and four community members.

The Sign Language Interpreter Act created the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) to license and regulate interpreters statewide. The law was designed to strengthen communication access for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals in critical settings such as healthcare, education, and the courts. By establishing clear professional standards and licensure requirements, the Act addresses past concerns about unqualified interpreters and promotes public safety, quality service, and accountability. A dedicated board fund supports SBSLI's ongoing oversight and operations, helping ensure consistent and reliable interpreting services throughout Maryland.

The Sign Language Interpreters Act aims to enhance the quality and professionalism of interpreting services in the state of Maryland. It will ensure that interpreters meet the right qualifications as well as adhere to professional standards and ethics.

The State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) oversees the licensing and professional standards of sign language interpreters in Maryland. Working in partnership with the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH), the Board helps ensure that Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders have access to qualified interpreters and effective communication across the state.

More information on the statute here: <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/bills/hb/hb0260t.pdf>

# State Board of Sign Language Interpreters

The State Board of Sign Language Interpreters 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.

A town hall meeting was held on April 10, 2024, to answer frequently asked questions. This meeting was held at Maryland School for the Deaf, Columbia Campus (8169 Old Montgomery Rd, Ellicott City, MD 21043).

The FY24 SBSLI Members met on the following dates:

December 6, 2023

January 3, 2024

March 6, 2024

March 28, 2024

June 26, 2024

## Members:

**Chair:** Trudy Suggs, Community Member

**Vice Chair:** Jacob Leffler, Community Member

Susan Beaver, Community Member

Pamela Collins, Community Member

Shane Feldman, Maryland Association of the Deaf

Kaylee Teixeira, Potomac Chapter Registry for the Deaf

DeafBlind Member - Vacant

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

# 2024 Legislative Session

The 2024 Legislative Session focused heavily on access for the DDBHH community. With the proposal of the Public Accommodations Bill for Movie Captioning (SB 92/HB 426) and the Co-Navigation Services Program (HB 98/SB 185), the goal was to push boundaries and become visible in more spaces. Additionally, HB 1456/SB 1096, also known as Eric's Law, was signed into law, allowing Marylanders with hidden disabilities to voluntarily add a butterfly symbol on their driver's license to alert first responders and law enforcement of their needs during interactions.

A growing discussion for this session was the Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids, or LEAD-K, and what it could mean for K-12 children in Maryland. This movement originally began in California as Senate Bill 210 in 2015 and has since been adopted by 20+ states. While this legislation was not introduced in the 2024 session, it remains an imperative conversation for access and language for Deaf children.

## Monitored Bills for 2024:

- HB 0098 Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing -DeafBlind Co-Navigation Services Program – Established
- SB 0185 Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing -DeafBlind Co-Navigation Services Program – Established
- HB 0426 Places of Public Accommodation – Motion Picture Houses – Captioning
- SB 0092 Places of Public Accommodation – Motion Picture Houses – Captioning
- HB 0699 Worker's Compensation – Benefits – Hearing Loss
- SB 0843 Worker's Compensation – Benefits – Hearing Loss
- SB 0796 Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established
- HB 1069 State Government – Commission for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing
- SB1084 State Government – Commission for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing
- HB 1141 Human Services – 2-1-1 and 3-1-1 Systems – Nonemergency Information and Referrals
- SB 1068 Human Services – 2-1-1 and 3-1-1 Systems – Nonemergency Information and Referrals
- HB 1456 Vehicle Laws – Licenses, Identification Cards, and Moped Operator's Permits – Identification of Nonapparent Disability
- SB 1096 Vehicle Laws – Licenses, Identification Cards, and Moped Operator's Permits – Identification of Nonapparent Disability

# Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing

In July 2024, the General Assembly authorized the formation of the Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing (Chapters 442 & 443, Acts of 2024). The Workgroup's charge is to study, assess, and make recommendations regarding:

- Direct and specialized case management services for Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing individuals.
- Development and administration of programs that support educational, employment, health, and social opportunities for them.
- Advocacy for policies, programs, and legislative initiatives that address their needs.
- Outreach efforts to raise public awareness and foster understanding of the challenges they face.
- Coordination with State agencies and the use of State resources to provide specialized case management services to deaf, deafblind, and Hard of Hearing individuals.
- Identification of barriers and gaps in communication access and development of solutions to improve their quality of life.
- Development of activities to enhance civic engagement between deaf, deafblind, and Hard of Hearing individuals and the community.

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

Authorization for the Workgroup ends June 30, 2026.

Find the statute here: [https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/Chapters\\_noln/CH\\_442\\_sb1084t.pdf](https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/Chapters_noln/CH_442_sb1084t.pdf)

# Partnerships

In order to strengthen the effectiveness and responsiveness of services provided to Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing actively collaborates with partner organizations and contributes its expertise to numerous advisory bodies, working groups, boards, and policy meetings. This fiscal year was heavily focused on identifying and addressing accessibility issues with the DDBHH community. GODHH worked closely with several workgroups and advisory boards, including:

- 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 Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH)
- Maryland Correctional Institution at Jessup for DDBHH Incarcerated Individuals
- Maryland Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI)
- National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH)
- Program Advisory Committee (PAC)

With the transitions, partnerships were strengthened within BHAC/CLCC as we joined the Behavioral Health Advisory Council and the Cultural & Linguistic Competency Committee. More partnerships were garnered with MDOD and Secretary Carol Beatty, TAM with David Bahar, MD Nonprofits and Maryland Latinos Unidos, the EHDI Advisory Council, a re-equipped partnership with NASADHH, and a new partnership for emergency response for language access with Victoria Rodriguez Roldan and Ellis Sardorian from MDOD. We also maintain a strong partnership with MDAD and continue to attend their town halls and symposiums.

# Town Hall Meetings

Town Halls are a great way for our office to connect with the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community and hear their concerns. Our office has partnered with MDAD to ensure the best quality meeting practices and to encourage Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing residents of Maryland to participate.

FY24 Town Hall Dates:

- July 29, 2023 Salisbury, MD - The Deaf Independent Living Association(DILA)
- April 10, 2024 Columbia, MD - Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD) Columbia Campus



# Managing for Results

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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 Digital 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\\_StrategicPlansFY24.aspx](https://dbm.maryland.gov/Pages/MFR_StrategicPlansFY24.aspx).

# Legislative Awareness Day 2023

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

The 2023 Legislative Awareness Day was held at 100 Community Place, where several members of the community were honored.

The presenters of these awards are:

- Meredith Desomma
- Tina Joyner
- Jacob Leffler
- Janet Weinstock
- Stephanie Summer
- Leslie Puzio

The recipients of the awards are:

- Marie Ann Campbell
- Rosemary Latin
- Tiasha Bera
- Senator Nancy King
- Patty Horton
- Tina Joyner
- Sheri Youens-Un
- Zellie Meadows

# 2023 LAD Presenters



# 2023 LAD Awardees





# Staff

**Usherla DeBerry**

*Director*

2023 - Present

**Kate Breen**

*Policy Manager*

2021 - 2024

**Papal Sharmacharya**

*Communication & Policy Manager*

2022- 2024

**Laura Lugar**

*Executive Assistant*

2023 - Present

