

§ 9-2404. Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH) - March 6, 2026 (Crownsville, MD)

**MACDHH Council Members Present: Interim Chair:** Mark Tersao **Vice Chair:** Vacant

Paige Bradford, Lauren Whiteman, Yolanda Dockery, John Serrano, Edwin Martinez Jr., Kathleen Farnsworth Kramer, Mark Tesoro, Ryan Murray(proxy) for Cleveland Horton II

**Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) Staff Members:** Director Usherla DeBerry, Tanéa Brown, and Diamon Halliburton.

**Absent:** Tony Bridges, Cleveland Horton II, Kristen Patterson, Allegra Hollins, Dianna Yamada, Maia Williams, Dana Hill, Cassidy Brooks Flagg, Dr. Daniel Koo, Bo Byun, Norma Moran

**Call to order:** 2:15PM

**Meeting Minutes:** Minutes from the January 9, 2026 meeting cannot be approved until we have a quorum.

**Interim Chair:** Mark's Report

- The Maryland legislative session is currently underway. It is a 90-day session ending in April, and the state is approximately halfway through. During this time, over 1,000 bills are introduced in Annapolis and will be approved, amended, or rejected by the end of the session.
- The chair acknowledged that Usherla and her team have been actively engaged in legislative work, and Usherla will provide a more detailed legislative update.
- The chair and Usherla recently met with the Maryland Association of the Deaf to review seven priority goals identified by the organization. Some goals are already in progress, while others will require additional time and coordination.
- One major goal discussed was improving language and communication access. The Maryland Department of Aging plans to work with Area Agencies on Aging and Maryland Access Points across the state to provide training on communication tools and respecting communication preferences. The training may involve collaboration with Usherla's office and the Maryland Association of the Deaf.
- Budget constraints remain a challenge, as state agencies are working to address a \$1.5 billion state deficit, limiting available funding for new initiatives. As a result, the office is exploring low-cost or virtual training options and partnerships to support communication access efforts.
- The chair also noted ongoing discussions with Ursula's team about potential funding strategies and budget line items to support communication access initiatives.

- Finally, the Chair shared a personal request for additional support from Council members. As the interim chair, they expressed limited capacity and encouraged Council members to consider taking on greater roles within the Council to help advance initiatives benefiting the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities in Maryland.

#### **Vice Chair's Report:**

- Vacant

**GODHH Director Usherla DeBerry, GODHH Outreach Interpreter Manager Tanéa Brown, and GODHH Administrative Assistant's Report:** GODHH Team Brief Reminder on Newsletter. [Click Here](#)

#### **Special Topic:**

- **Kathleen Moran Doskos, Legal Advocacy;**
  - Kathleen Moran Doskos, a Deaf, neurodivergent individual with close vision, presented on her background, career, and advocacy goals. She holds a Bachelor's in Social Work from RIT and a Master's in Student Development from CCSU, with over 30 years in higher education. She learned ASL in college and now primarily uses it, sometimes combining it with total communication. Kathleen has a lifelong passion for advocacy, beginning at age 11 when she spoke out to prevent closure of a Deaf classroom in Rochester, NY, and continuing with self-advocacy in high school before the ADA. She is currently training at AACC to become a legal advocate, focusing on supporting Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals in civil matters.
  - Kathleen highlighted differences between state and federal courts in providing accessibility. State courts comply with ADA Title II, offering on-site interpreters and Virtual Relay Interpreting (VRI) services, while federal courts provide interpreters only during trial, leaving pre- and post-trial interactions inaccessible. She clarified the distinctions between lawyers, interpreters, and legal advocates, noting that legal advocates can explain legal terms, provide resources, and teach self-advocacy but cannot provide legal advice or represent clients in court. Her goals include mediating civil disputes, collaborating with ODHH and legal organizations to update accessible legal resources, raising awareness of legal rights, and encouraging community support to improve federal court accessibility and share contacts of experienced legal organizations.
- **Mike Purkey, Executive Director from Deaf Independent Living Association (DILA)**
  - Mike Purkey, Executive Director of the Deaf Independent Living Association (DILA), shared an overview of the organization's work supporting Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals with disabilities, primarily developmental or I/DD. Founded 44 years ago in Frederick, DILA is now located in Salisbury, Maryland, providing housing, employment services, supported living, and personal supports under DDA guidelines. The organization emphasizes true independent living, allowing individuals to make their own choices about daily activities, finances,

and lifestyle, ensuring they live lives comparable to their non-disabled peers. DILA serves a wide age range, from 22 to 84, and celebrates milestones such as employment, homeownership, and life events like weddings.

- Purkey announced the upcoming opening of two group homes in Frederick this summer, expanding services closer to families in that area. These community-based homes will offer safe, three-bedroom, two-bath residences for individuals who know each other and are excited about the opportunity. DILA already provides personal supports and employment services in Frederick and plans to continue expanding. Purkey encouraged community support and collaboration, directing anyone with questions to contact DILA via their website. The session concluded with recognition of DILA's role in helping graduates of the Maryland School for the Deaf transition to independent living and community engagement.
- **Deanna Bracken and Dani Lawson, Community Partnership Unit, Baltimore Police Department "Visor Project"**
  - Dani Lawson and Deanna Bracken, special liaisons from the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) Community Partnership Unit, presented on their work connecting BPD with diverse populations, including Deaf, hard of hearing, neurodivergent, immigrant, LGBTQIA+, and older adult communities. Their roles include attending community events, building programs, and providing resources to ensure safety and communication. Key initiatives include senior ID bracelets and neurodivergent key chains, which allow officers to quickly identify individuals with specific needs and access contact and medical information in emergencies. The program is voluntary and currently focused on Baltimore City, with plans to expand based on demand.
  - A major focus of their presentation was the Visor Program, adapted from the Wisconsin Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, designed to reduce anxiety and risk during police interactions. The visor sheet provides visual communication tools for traffic stops or other encounters and is available in English and Spanish. The team is exploring ways to include ASL and updated community contact information on the sheets and plans to distribute laminated copies at community events. Feedback from the community was encouraged to improve accessibility and usability. The liaisons emphasized collaboration with organizations such as GODHH and expressed openness to partnerships with additional advocacy groups.

### **Old Business**

- N/A

### **New Business**

- Mark Tesoro is asking if there is any new business from the council.
- Lauren Whiteman is announcing the EHDI stakeholder meeting on May 20 (virtual) and sending information.
- Mark Tesoro sharing Department of Aging caregiver needs assessment (Johns Hopkins Memory Care Family Checklist).

**Announcements**

- John Serrano is announcing the Maryland School for the Deaf Frederick campus open house for professionals on March 25, 9:00–11:00 a.m.

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The meeting was adjourned at 3:41 PM