

**§ 9-2404. Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH) –
Minutes of June 5, 2026 (Crownsville, MD)**

Advisory Council Members / Representatives

- **Mark Tesoro** – Interim Chair, Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; representative of the Maryland Department of Aging.
- **Tanea Brown** – Outreach Manager.
- **Usherla DeBerry** – Director, Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.
- **Diamon Haliburton** – Administrative Assistant; Legislative Liaison
- **Marcus J. Smith** – Community member and board member.
- **Cassidy Brooks Flagg** – Citizen with hearing loss.
- **Dianna Yamada** – Citizen with hearing loss.
- **Dr. Daniel Koo** – Deaf citizen of Maryland.
- **Edwin (Eddie) Martinez Jr.** – Representative of the DeafBlind community and board member.
- **Kathi (Kathleen Farnsworth) Kramer** – Maryland Deaf Access Committee
- **Spencer Dove** – Special Assistant, Maryland Commission for Civil Rights; attending on behalf of Cleveland Horton.
- **Lauren Whiteman** – Director, Office of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs, Maryland Department of Health.
- **Kristen Patterson** – Disability and Youth Services Coordinator, Department of Labor.
- **Yolanda Dockery** – Chief of Staff, Family Investment Administration, Department of Human Services.
- **Allegra Hollins** – Director, Office of Fair Practices, Department of Housing and Community Development.
- **Dr. Paige Bradford** – Section Chief of Specialized Instruction, Division of Special Education, Maryland State Department of Education.

Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) Staff Members:

- **Usherla DeBerry** – Director, Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing.
- **Tanea Brown** – Outreach Manager.
- **Diamon Haliburton** – Administrative Assistant; Legislative Liaison

Guest Presenters / Guests

- **Sharon MacDougall** – Guest presenter.
- **Justin Lee** – Quantum Senses; guest presenter.
- **Cydne Smith** – Special Assistant, Office of Appointments; guest presenter.
- **Rebecca Scissors** – ADA Coordinator, Prince George's County Parks and Recreation.
- **Scott MacDougall** – Supporting Sharon MacDougall.
- **Shane Dundas** – Eddie Martinez's co-navigator.
- **Caroline** – Mark Tesoro's daughter.

Absent: Tony Bridges, Cleveland Horton II, Maia Williams, Dana Hill, Bo Byun, Norma Moran

Meeting Support

- **Claire Baldi** – Captioner for the meeting.

Total identified attendees: 23 people.

Call to order: 2:08PM

Meeting Minutes: A Motion to approve the Minutes from the January 9, 2026 meeting was made and approved. A Motion to approve the Minutes from March 6, 2026 were also made and approved.

Newsletter: GODHH Director Usherla DeBerry, GODHH Outreach Interpreter Manager Tanéa Brown, and GODHH Administrative Assistant's Report: GODHH Team Brief Reminder on Newsletter. [Click](https://odhh.maryland.gov/newsletter-of-reports-from-godhh-for-macdhh/) (<https://odhh.maryland.gov/newsletter-of-reports-from-godhh-for-macdhh/> for our newsletters, reports from GODHH).

Interim Chair Report:

Mark Tesoro reported on a collaborative planning meeting held on May 22 with representatives from the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Office of Disabilities, the Department of Human Services, and other partner agencies. The group reviewed the priorities and goals established by the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and discussed how agencies could work together to support their implementation. Participants reviewed approximately half of the identified objectives, prioritizing them based on feasibility, timeline, and funding requirements. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for June 15 to complete the review and develop an action plan. Mark described the meeting as productive and noted strong interest among participants in continuing the collaborative effort. He commended Director Usherla DeBerry and her team for their work in advancing these initiatives.

He noted that his office of roughly 40 to 50 people, like ODHH, depends on the collective effort of everyone involved to move the work forward. He took a moment to recognize the accomplishments of those present, particularly commending their ability to navigate challenges within a hearing world. He closed by noting that a key part of his role is to convene groups, departments, and agencies in order to build traction and momentum around their shared priorities. No questions were raised.

Director's Report:

Director Usherla DeBerry provided an update on the Senior Citizens Group for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing, noting the group is actively working to meet its requirements with a focus on the long-term health and independence of the people it serves. Director DeBerry also announced that ODHH will be officially renamed the Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (ODDBHH), **effective October 1st**, with a new logo and website to be launched accordingly. She directed members to the folder containing the office's

quarterly report and second newsletter, which is still in progress, and requested feedback on the newsletter's appearance before it is posted publicly. No questions were raised.

Diamon Halliburton: Recognized Junior NAD who was online today, then introduced our first of three topic speakers.

Special Topics:

Presenter: Sharon MacDougall – Mental Health Services in Maryland

Sharon MacDougall, a 35-year advocate with personal and professional ties to the Deaf community, presented an overview of publicly funded mental health services in Maryland. She traced the history of these services from their absence prior to the 1980s, through the creation of the Deaf Unit at Springfield State Hospital following a 1983 lawsuit, to the development of regional community-based programs. She noted that the shift to fee-for-service billing in 1997 was particularly damaging, as it failed to account for the added costs of interpreter services and longer session times, driving experienced providers out of the system and reducing available services. Current providers include Arundel Lodge in Annapolis and a telemental health program serving the Eastern Shore, developed through a collaboration between Gallaudet University and former ODHH Director Kelby Brick.

MacDougall identified three major priorities for improving the system: stronger community advocacy, better data collection, and a comprehensive statewide model of care. She called for a formal advocacy committee and greater community involvement, noting that the current effort relies on only a handful of individuals. She emphasized that incomplete intake data significantly undercounts Deaf individuals receiving services, weakening the case for dedicated funding. Her vision for Maryland includes regionalized service centers, state-employed Deaf mental health coordinators, and culturally competent direct service providers, modeled after successful programs in other states. She closed by expressing cautious optimism, citing recent monthly meetings with the Behavioral Health Administration and increased state openness to community input, and thanked Director DeBerry for her continued partnership in this work.

Comment – Director Usherla DeBerry thanked Sharon MacDougall for her presentation and noted that the two serve as co-chairs of the Cultural Linguistic Inclusivity Committee under the Behavioral Health Authority. She reminded those present that advocacy extends beyond the committee, pointing to her involvement with Developmental Disabilities Day at the Capitol in Annapolis as an example of broader coalition-building across the disability community. She expressed her goal of bringing a Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing contingent to the Capitol in 2027 to make the community's presence known alongside other disability advocates.

Presenter: Justin Lee, Quantum Senses – EARCOUSTIC Headphones

Justin Lee presented EARCOUSTIC, a nonelectronic, affordable assistive listening device he invented after a Vietnam veteran friend was unable to afford traditional hearing aids, which typically range from \$1,500 to \$6,000. Priced at \$20, the product requires no batteries, wires,

or Bluetooth, and works by amplifying forward-facing sound through custom support cups using basic acoustic physics, similar to the concept of an amphitheater. It is designed for individuals with mild to moderate hearing loss, particularly seniors and children with ADHD, and is worn over the ear rather than in the ear canal. The device is made from recyclable, sanitizable plastic, making it practical for shared use in classrooms or other group settings. Studies conducted at the University of Maryland College Park and Winston-Salem State University demonstrated a measurable increase in sound amplification and a correlation between improved hearing and enhanced brain functionality. Lee noted that with 48 million Americans and 1.5 billion people worldwide affected by hearing loss, the market need is significant and expected to grow. Quantum Senses has received multiple grants and awards in Maryland and has been featured in outlets including the Washington Post.

Presenter: Cydne Smith, Special Assistant – Governor's Office of Appointments

Cydne Smith provided an overview of the Governor's Office of Appointments, which oversees more than 600 boards and commissions with approximately 5,000 seats across the state. She explained that boards fall into two categories: Senate confirmable boards, which require candidates to appear before the Senate for confirmation and can only receive appointments between December and February, and general boards, which allow for a more flexible recruitment process. She emphasized that board service is open to all Marylanders, including members of the Deaf and hard of hearing community, who are encouraged to apply not only to disability-related boards but to any board aligned with their interests. Applications are submitted through a public portal, and candidates can also be recommended by others. The office can be reached at gov.appointments@maryland.gov and typically responds within 4 to 24 hours.

Cydne outlined the appointment process in detail, which includes application, vetting, background verification, paperwork, and in many cases an oath of office. She stressed that completing the oath is critical, as failure to do so can render a member's votes null and void and potentially place compliance responsibility on the agency or executive director. The office follows a two-consecutive-term policy to ensure fresh representation, and Smith noted that when the current administration took office, some board seats had been held by the same individuals for 10 to 20 years. Addressing this turnover is viewed as an opportunity to bring new voices into the work of each board and commission.

Ms. Smith spoke at length about the office's commitment to diversity and representation, noting that appointments are carefully considered with attention to gender balance, geographic distribution, age, disability, veteran status, and LGBTQIA identity, among other factors. She used the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters as an example of strong geographic representation, while also acknowledging areas where improvement is still needed, such as increasing male representation on certain disability and aging boards. She noted that Maryland was recognized by the Washington Post in 2020 as one of the most diverse states on the East Coast, and that this diversity should be reflected in the makeup of its boards. She closed by sharing that Governor Moore personally pays close attention to board composition, and

encouraged those present to refer anyone from their networks who might be interested in serving the state.

Comment – Director Usherla DeBerry thanked Cydne Smith for her presentation and provided an update on efforts to streamline the board vacancy and nominations process. She noted that the office has developed a nomination form to reduce back-and-forth communication and allow for a more efficient submission process directly to the Governor's Office of Appointments. The ODHHS website will be updated to include a nominations option under the membership section, which will direct submissions to both Mark Tesoro's office and ODHHS. She emphasized that the goal is to ensure close collaboration with the Governor's Office to fill vacancies and address community needs in a coordinated, team-oriented manner.

Interim Chair – Mark Tesoro commended the quality of presentations at the meeting. He also emphasized the importance of asset-mapping, which he described as identifying and leveraging existing resources rather than creating new boards, committees, or councils, particularly given limited funding availability. He urged state agency representatives in the room to consider how their work could support the efforts outlined by Director DeBerry and her team.

New Business

- Mark transitioned the meeting toward a vote, announcing the opportunity to elect Marcus Smith as the new chair and Kathi Kramer as the new secretary.
- A Motion was made and seconded as to both appointments and congratulations to Marcus Smith as our incoming Chair and Kathi Kramer as incoming secretary.
- Mark Tesoro will now serve as Vice Chair, and we thank all of our volunteers for continued service to the Council.

Announcements:

- Kristen Patterson, Maryland Department of Labor, highlighted two items. First, she invited attendees to the upcoming Raising the Bar workforce conference in September, a two-day statewide event representing all 13 local workforce areas, with a pre-conference focused on youth services. Second, she encouraged community members to register for policy update notifications through the Maryland Department of Labor's website and to submit public comments on policies and initiatives, specifically urging advocates to raise the needs of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing community. She noted that local workforce areas are currently drafting their local plans, which detail how workforce services are delivered in each area, and that this public comment cycle only occurs every two years, making this a critical window for community input.
- Kathleen K. Maryland Deaf Access Committee, announced two new resources available through the national website: Deafaa.org. The first is a new video phone support line, USA VP# (503) 714-3331, providing real-time assistance to callers, or email: Deafaasupline@gmail.com. A Deaf AA member will get back to you within 24 hours. The

second is a new public-facing Deaf AA Facebook page where individuals, including non-alcoholics, can learn about the process of seeking help. Publically searchable: Deaf Alcoholics Anonymous Group.

- Mark Tesoro, Maryland Department of Aging, noted that the office has applied for multiple grants through the Administration for Community Living aimed at improving caregiver services and supports, with results still pending. They emphasized the broad relevance of caregiving, noting that most people will assume a caregiver role at some point in their lives, and underscored the office's commitment to supporting that population.
- Edwin Martinez Jr. expressed pride and gratitude regarding the renaming of ODHH to the Governor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (ODDBHH), calling it the culmination of a long-fought effort by the DeafBlind community to be formally recognized. He honored the late Anne Black, noting that the renaming represents the realization of her dream, and thanked all board members and supporters whose efforts made it possible.

Closing Comments: Director Usherla DeBerry thanked all presenters and echoed Edwin Martinez Jr.'s recognition of the late Anne Black, leading the group in a moment of silence in her honor. She then announced that a new website, hosted through the Governor's Office, will launch October 1st, at which time it will be updated to include the DeafBlind community in alignment with the office's renaming to ODDBHH. She noted that the new site will be accessible directly from the Governor's Office homepage.

Old Business

- None

There were no comments from the online participants and no Town Hall concerns from the community.

The Meeting was adjourned at 3:54 p.m.