

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF DIRECTOR KELBY BRICK, ESQ., CDI**

FISCAL YEAR 2018 OPERATING BUDGET HEARINGS

**HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES SUB-COMMITTEE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Delegate Kirill Reznik, Chair
Delegate Theodore Sophocleus, Vice Chair
February 22, 2017**

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE
SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE
Senator Richard S. Madaleno, Jr., Chair
February 23, 2017**

Good afternoon, distinguished members of the committee. I am honored to be here representing Governor Hogan's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. For those of you who were here in 2001, I worked closely with many of you to write and pass House Bill 1187, which established this office. The establishment of this office would not have happened without the bipartisan support of the Maryland legislature—passing the House by a 127-8 vote and the Senate by a 47-0 vote. Little did I know that more than 15 years later I would be front of you once again talking about the office budget and its work.

I am gratified that the DLS' budget analysis concurs with the Governor's allowance.

As stated in the analysis, we have 3 goals. The first goal is to expand the Deaf ecosystem to support current and aspiring Deaf and hard of hearing business owners to reduce underemployment and unemployment. The second goal is to develop a policy framework to address fraudulent and unqualified interpreters in the State of Maryland. The third goal is to collaborate with State services, agencies and programs to improve the efficiency and quality of services delivered to Deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders.

I am proud to report that we have brought in top-notch staff. This has paid dividends in many ways as we address more complex and systematic policy barriers to equal opportunities for all of our citizens. Here with me in the room are Deborah Nathanson, our Policy Manager, and Allysa Dittmar, our Communications and Policy Manager.

We have been hard at work reaching out to Deaf and hard of hearing business owners to better understand the systemic challenges that they face and then pivoting to address those challenges on a statewide policy level.

The budget analysis reports correctly that training and information sessions provided by our office have been reduced. This is a direct result of our shift to focus on policy making and oversight. We have worked closely with state departments and agencies to ensure that

their services are accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing constituents. This ensures a systematic approach and allows citizens to connect directly to subject matter experts in the various departments and agencies. We have also increased our assistance to community stakeholders and constituents.

We do measure this shift in focus and our metrics reflect this shift. As the DLS analysis notes, we have increased our assistance to community stakeholders and constituents by a third. We have also doubled our information and referral provided to state agencies. Those are two metrics that we are very proud of that will produce long lasting results.

The reduction in the budget is not a reduction in our staffing or services. The reduction is a reflection of improved efficiencies and savings realized by our office when we moved from Baltimore to Crownsville. This saved us funds on rent as well as related technology and service expenditures when we were isolated in Baltimore. We are now housed with other Governor's coordinating offices which enables shared services, collaboration, and significant efficiencies in office operations.

The DLS analysis correctly notes that we have received an increasing number of complaints regarding unqualified and fraudulent sign language interpreters from constituents and businesses throughout the state. Unqualified and fraudulent interpreters in courts, government, schools, hospitals, and many other settings can cause significant harm to businesses, institutions and Deaf and hard of hearing constituents by failing to convey accurate information.

We hope to have a proposal by mid-late 2017 that address the state procurement procedures for contacting with certified and qualified interpreters—including possibly establishing a state centralized interpreter fund. We also hope to establish minimum standards for private use of sign language interpreters. More details can be found in our formal written response to the DLS analysis.

The office has especially promoted the growth and use of the Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) profession, ensuring that CDIs are used in state emergency broadcasts, public official meetings, and meetings that involve DeafBlind constituents. This is important as interpreters who are Deaf provides native fluency in American Sign Language where immediate and accurate information is necessary in critical and/or high profile situations.

Make no mistake; there are numerous barriers to the full and equal participation in society for all of our citizens. We are committed to taking down those barriers brick by brick so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in society.

I look forward to working with you in the coming months to address those various issues. My staff and I will be happy to take any questions you may have either today or in the coming days.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
AGENCY RESPONSE TO**

DLS RECOMMENDATIONS

FISCAL YEAR 2018 OPERATING BUDGET HEARINGS

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Issues

The DLS Budget Analysis identified two areas where it sought comments from the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. They are as follows:

1. *"ODHH should comment on how it can better measure policies and programs that are created or altered through assistance it provides."*
2. *"ODHH should comment on where they are in their research and the feasibility of implementing a streamlined licensing process."*

Agency Response

The budget analysis reports correctly that training and information sessions provided by our office have been reduced. This is a direct result of our shift to focus on policy making and oversight. We have worked closely with state departments and agencies to ensure that their services are accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing constituents. This ensures a systematic approach and allows citizens to connect directly to subject matter experts in the various departments and agencies. We have also increased our assistance to community stakeholders and constituents.

We do measure this shift in focus and our metrics reflect this shift. As the DLS analysis notes, "the number of instances where assistance is provided by ODHH to community stakeholders and constituents increased by 32%.¹ The office also has doubled its information and referral provided to state agencies (97%).²

¹ DLS analysis, Exhibit 1

² DLS analysis, Exhibit 2

2. As the report notes, we have received an increasing number of complaints regarding unqualified and fraudulent sign language interpreters from constituents and businesses throughout the state. 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 and effectively isolating Deaf and hard of hearing constituents from their community at large.

The office had previously supported the concept of potential interpreter licensure legislation for the state of Maryland to prevent fraudulent and unqualified sign language interpreters. However, since the process was based on the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)'s certification process, the project was put on hold when RID put a moratorium on the certification process.

Consequently, the office shifted gears and has been gathering information on alternatives for assessing and ensuring interpreting quality in Maryland that is not contingent on RID. In accordance with Governor Hogan's agenda to improve state efficiency, the office has been conducting research on ways to improve the efficiency and quality of interpreting services within state departments and agencies in Maryland, such as the possibility of centralizing interpreting services within the state. At the beginning of FY16, the office increased quality control and efficiency by streamlining its interpreting processes into one primary interpreting agency and exclusively contracting with only qualified and certified interpreters.

We hope to have a proposal by mid-late 2017 that will address the following:

- 1) State procurement procedures for contacting with certified and qualified interpreters—including possibly established a state centralized interpreter fund.
- 2) Minimum standards for private use of sign language interpreters.

The office has especially promoted the growth and use of the Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) profession, ensuring that CDIs are used in state emergency broadcasts, public official meetings, and meetings that involve DeafBlind constituents. This is important as interpreters who are Deaf provides native fluency in American Sign Language where immediate and accurate information is necessary in critical and/or high profile situations.

DLS Recommended Action

“Concur with the Governor’s Allowance”

Agency Response

We respectfully support this recommended action.