



## **GOVERNOR'S COORDINATING OFFICES**

Community Initiatives · Service & Volunteerism · Performance Improvement  
Crime Prevention, Youth, & Victim Services · Small, Minority, & Women Business Affairs  
Banneker-Douglass Museum · Volunteer Maryland · Deaf & Hard of Hearing

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

#### **FISCAL YEAR 2022 OPERATING BUDGET HEARING January 28, 2020**

#### **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE Senator Melony Griffith, Chair**

#### **HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE Delegate Kirill Reznik, Chair Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith, Vice Chair**

Greetings Chair and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to be here on behalf of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as its Director. I have been coming here for well over two decades in various capacities and I want to acknowledge how important this process is to a democratic governing system.

I would like to thank our Legislative Analyst Grace Pedersen for her work in understanding our office. I know that Ms. Pedersen has worked very hard to understand how the State is serving its Deaf and hard of hearing residents and how the state can and should do more. I am gratified that the DLS's budget analysis concurs with the Governor's allowance.

I am also very grateful to Governor Hogan and his administration for their continued commitment to our office and I am very grateful to the staff of our office for working so hard and tirelessly to achieve so much in the past year under very difficult conditions.

As the office approaches FY22, we continue to be leaders for our nation in access to education, jobs, and support of the Deaf Ecosystem in changing Maryland for the better.<sup>1</sup> With the support of the Deaf and hard of hearing community, the Hogan Administration has been able to proactively move forward in guiding the State on policy matters and providing technical assistance in various situations including our response to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to increasing accessibility to the Governor's press conferences, we also ensured access for state-operated drive-through testing as well as providing 200 American Sign Language educational videos during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our work here has been recognized by FEMA as exemplary and it has incorporated our work into its internal and training processes. Other states have consulted with our office to better understand our historical work for emulation purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Deaf Ecosystem's fundamental approach is to retain and harness the collective socio-economic power within the community's individuals, organizations, and businesses through community collaboration and support. See <https://odhh.maryland.gov/deaf-ecosystem>.

We have done a number of other noteworthy things. We have been able to significantly increase the diversity of the Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This has really strengthened the council and its work with us in so many different ways. We have finally brought text-to-911 into full service all across the state. While this is really critical for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, this really benefits every single individual in the state for so many different reasons.

There are additional details in our FY 20 Annual Report that is available on our website.

## Responses

### **Page 6 Key Observations:**

**The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends that ODHH begin tracking the number of complaints received in total, the number of complaints received by industry, and the nature of the complaints that it received (such as the interpreter being reported unskilled or unqualified and fraudulent or unethical). DLS also recommends committee narrative requesting that ODHH begin reporting this data as part of its annual MFR submission.**

We concur with the legislative analyst's recommendation that we begin tracking the number of complaints of sign language interpreters in such a way that breaks down the nature of the complaints into further details. That will help the State better understand the depth and breadth of the impact of fraudulent and unqualified interpreters.

### **Page 7 Key Observations:**

**ODHH should comment on whether any of the proposed policy options could affect the number of qualified interpreters in the State and identify which policy option, or combination thereof, would be most appropriate for Maryland**

None of the policy options in our JCR response on interpreters should affect the number of qualified interpreters in the State. Those who are already qualified will continue to be able to provide interpreting services. Those options in the JCR response will, to varying degrees, prevent the exploitation of fraudulent interpreters while allowing for a more robust pathway for developing unqualified interpreters into qualified interpreters. The best way to increase the number of qualified interpreters in the State, however, is to strengthen our educational and training pathways. The State does not have any BA or graduate program in sign language interpreting and that is one major area that needs to be addressed in any serious conversation regarding how we can strengthen the State's sign language interpreting workforce. We hope to discuss any concerns we may have with any interested legislative bill sponsors.

### **Page 9 Key Observations:**

**ODHH should comment on the status of planning for a new statewide visual communications contract and when ODHH expects the new contract to be awarded.**

We continue to collaborate with the Department of General Services, the lead agency, in its efforts to develop a scope of work and structure for a new visual communication contract while looking at other avenues for increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of access to State government services. This includes options such as having a hybrid model of services provided both in-house and through a procurement process.

### **Page 10 Recommended Actions**

We concur.