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FISCAL YEAR 2023 OPERATING BUDGET HEARING MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

DIRECTOR KELBY BRICK, ESQ., CDI

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE

Delegate Kirill Reznik, Chair

Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith, Vice Chair

February 9, 2022

SENATE BUDGET & TAXATION COMMITTEE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE

Senator Melony Griffith, Chair

February 10, 2022

Greetings Chair and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to be here once again on behalf of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as its Director.

I would like to thank 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 may 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.

In the last fiscal year, we prioritized the health and safety of our community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and have responded accordingly to this need. We've worked to expand access to COVID-19 testing and mass vaccination sites through the implementation of ASL and pro-tactile accessible sites, along with assistive technology for captioning and other forms of services. We've worked to combat COVID-19 misinformation through the dissemination of an informative video series about the virus and the vaccination process. We've worked to ensure

ASL interpretation of press conferences and keep the Deaf and hard of hearing community apprised of updates through ASL video debriefs of the press conferences. And we've worked with community leaders to host town hall meetings to keep the public informed. We have expanded services to and access for 1.2 million Deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders.

It is because of the collaborative efforts of the Maryland government and its residents that our state currently sees one of the highest vaccination rates in the nation. This success is also evident in the Deaf community, as shown through a recent nationwide survey assessing the experiences in information access regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey, conducted by the Health Signs Center, revealed strengths in Maryland's performance with Deaf Marylanders who have responded more favorably in nearly all categories of the COVID-19 access survey. This includes interpreting and captioning access at press conferences, trustworthiness in American Sign Language-translated online information, the provision of qualified Deaf interpreters, and the State's inclusivity of the Deaf in emergency preparedness.

We are also proud to announce the statewide rollout of text-to-911, which allows Deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders to text 911 in the event of an emergency. This is a monumental accomplishment and we can feel safer knowing this will lead to swifter emergency responses.

The Governor's Office is dedicated to making Maryland a better place for the 1.2 million Deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders to live, work, raise a family, and retire. Our work will never be complete, but we are proud of our ongoing successes.

With your continued support and adoption of the Governor's budget proposal for our office, we will continue to be a leader for our nation in access to education, jobs, and support of the Deaf Ecosystem, a critical tool in combating the pervasive underemployment and unemployment that many Deaf and hard of hearing individuals experience, in changing Maryland for the better.

I am very much appreciative of your time here and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Recommended Action

Concur with the Governor's allowance.

Agency Response: We respectfully agree with this recommended action.