

**Wes Moore**  
*Governor*

**Aruna Miller**  
*Lt. Governor*



**Usherla DeBerry**  
*Acting Director*

**FISCAL YEAR 2025 OPERATING BUDGET TESTIMONY  
MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

**ACTING DIRECTOR USHERLA DEBERRY, Ed.S.**

**HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Delegate Emily Shetty, Chair  
Delegate Dana Jones, Vice Chair  
February 8, 2024**

**SENATE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE**

**Senator Cory V. McCray  
February 12, 2024**

Greetings Chair and distinguished members of the committee, it is my honor to be here on behalf of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing as its Acting Director. I look forward to working with the Moore-Miller administration to support Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community in Maryland.

I would like to thank our Legislative Analyst Nathaly Andrade for her work with our office, and her understanding of what we do for the Deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders. I am very thankful to our hardworking team, Kate Breen and Payal Sharmacharya.

In the last fiscal year, among our highlights, we continued to meet with the Department of Human Services to improve Deaf and hard of hearing access to their services. We provided support to Behavioral Health Administration's five regional stakeholder meetings in late winter of 2023 to address gaps in state behavioral health services for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing consumers. In October 2023, BHA hosted a successful day-long training seminar opened by Lt. Governor Miller. We invited Deaf and hard of hearing professionals and published academics from the behavioral health field to give presentations. Some of them are actively providing services and some who are conducting research, especially for children and how BIPOC Deaf and hard of hearing consumers are impacted. Some hosted breakout groups. In the same month, ODHHS began participating as a subject matter expert for the Workgroup on Social Worker Requirements for Licensure to address the low passing rates of Deaf and hard of hearing social workers obtaining their licenses. In September, ODHHS staff visited Frederick County Public School and Montgomery County Public School to meet with K-12 interpreters and

observed classrooms. Additionally, the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) were appointed in November.

The Board first met in December and again after the holidays. They are now working in sub groups on certain topics such as virtual interpreting, K-12 interpreting settings, medical settings, reciprocity, agencies/vendors and more. The Board and ODHH are actively working on the portal.

#### **Personnel Data, page 4.**

**The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends adjusting the budgeted turnover for these new positions to 25% in line with the recommended budgeted turnover for new positions.** ODHH respectfully disagrees. The State Board of Sign Language Interpreters and ODHH are working towards a functional portal by July 2024. As such, recruitment efforts will begin immediately upon passage of the budget bill. The additional staffing will support efforts to manage the applications and licensing once the portal is available. This will also include outreach activities to meet with various organizations and offices including hospitals and clinics to provide them tools in identifying licensed interpreters allowed to work in the State and to consult with us, to help them prepare by January 1, 2025 when the licensure goes into effect. Outreach also includes providing interpreting workshops for continuing education units, for instance.

#### **Key Observations**

##### **State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, page 6.**

**DLS recommends adopting committee narrative requesting that ODHH provide a report with an update on the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters operation.**

ODHH concurs.

#### **Operating Budget Recommended Actions, pages 9-10.**

**1. Increase turnover expectancy for 2.0 new positions from 0% to 25% to be consistent with budgeted turnover for new positions.**

ODHH respectfully disagrees. The State Board of Sign Language Interpreters and ODHH are working towards a functional portal by July 2024. As such, recruitment efforts will begin immediately upon passage of the budget bill. The additional staffing will support efforts to manage the applications and licensing once the portal is available. This will also include outreach activities to meet with various organizations and offices including hospitals and clinics to provide them tools in identifying licensed interpreters allowed to work in the State and to consult with us, to help them prepare by January 1, 2025 when the licensure goes into effect.

**2. Adopt the following narrative: Update on State Board of Sign Language Interpreters**

ODHH concurs.

**Appendix 1, page 11.**

ODHH is actively working to complete and submit the requested JCR.

I thank you for your valuable time here and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.