

Wes Moore
Governor

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



Usherla DeBerry
Director

FISCAL YEAR 2027 OPERATING BUDGET TESTIMONY
MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

DIRECTOR USHERLA DEBERRY, Ed.S.

HOUSE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE

Delegate Emily Shetty, Chair
Delegate Dana Jones, Vice Chair
February 11, 2026

SENATE HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE

Senator Cory V. McCray
February 13, 2026

Greetings, Chair, Vice Chair, and distinguished members of the committee, I am Usherla DeBerry, Director of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. It is my honor to be here on behalf of the office as its Director. It is truly a privilege to work with the Moore-Miller administration to support the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community in Maryland.

I would like to thank our Legislative Analyst, Connor Brown, for all his work with our office. I am very grateful for my hardworking team, Diamon Halliburton and Tanéa Brown.

This fiscal year focused on sustaining open communication with the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community and the ASL Interpreter community. We achieved this through Town Hall meetings held both with and without our advisory board, the Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. ODHH also supported and facilitated the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Maryland Workgroup in developing its recommendations.

Page 4 Personnel Data:

The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends abolishing 1 of the vacant positions that has been vacant for more than one year.

The Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) respectfully disagrees with the recommendation to abolish one of the vacant positions. The Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community is historically underrepresented and has faced longstanding barriers to access and inclusion. Reducing staffing levels within ODHH would have a disproportionate impact on this community and undermine the agency's ability to effectively serve its constituents.

Due to the statewide hiring freeze, delays, and extensive public feedback related to the implementation of the Sign Language Interpreters Act, ODHH temporarily suspended recruitment efforts. However, the agency considers these positions critical and intends to complete recruitment by the end of FY 2026, with all positions filled at the start of FY 2027.

Additionally, Chapters 442 and 443 of 2024 established Workgroup for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) community. Full staffing is essential for ODHH to properly implement and support this unit. Eliminating one of the vacant positions would significantly hinder the agency's ability to carry out this work and fulfill its broader statutory responsibilities.

For these reasons, ODHH does not concur with the recommendation to abolish the vacant position.

Page 5 Key Observations:

DLS recommends adopting committee narrative requesting that ODHH submit two reports with updates on the development of State sign language interpreter licensing regulations.

The ODHH concurs with the recommended action of providing updates on the Sign Language Interpreter Licensing Requirements.

Page 7 Operating Budget Recommended Actions:

1. The ODHH respectfully disagrees with the recommendation of abolishing one of the vacant positions that has been vacant for more than one year.
2. The ODHH concurs with the recommended action of providing updates on the Sign Language Interpreter Licensing Requirements.