

My name is Tina Joyner, I am the Vice President of the Maryland Association of the Deaf. The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization that protects the interests of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders concerning accessibility and equality issues. We are advocating for the passage of Senate Bill 400 sponsored by Senator Benjamin Brooks and Senator C. Anthony Muse regarding movie theater captioning. There are approximately 1.2 million Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals living in the State of Maryland.

As you heard, the community experiences issues and problems with the closed caption devices at movie theaters. Yes, Federal Law requires closed captions devices at the movie theaters. However, that does not cover open captioning movies that give us equal access. The National Association of Theater Owners say that the federal law is sufficient. However, we would like to make a point that the Federal Government gives the States' rights to create laws. We believe that it is important for the State of Maryland to establish this law to ensure that the community at the state-level are protected and have equal access for all. State laws can solve issues that citizens of Maryland are experiencing. We ask that the State of Maryland provides equal access for all.

NATO is concerned about low sales and loss of business, we want to point out that all businesses were impacted by the pandemic, not just movie theaters. The public is returning back to what is normal for all of us. This bill can attract others who haven't gone to movie theaters, not just deaf and hard of hearing communities and this will bring more revenues for the movie theaters.

Hawaii is the first, and so far, the only state that implemented this law since 2019. MDAD contacted a state association in Hawaii, which indicated that the financial impact for the movie theaters has NO negative impacts. If the cash flow was negative, these movie theater operators would have already been championing removing the law by now. More recently, in December of 2021, NYC passed a similar law. I would like to mention that NATO stated during last year's hearing before the Economics Matters Committee that it does not cost a penny to turn the open captioning on the screen. Now is the time for Maryland to lead the national effort in equal access for all in the movie theaters.

We look forward to a favorable report on SB 400.