

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2026 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Third Reader - Revised**

House Bill 866  
Health

(Delegate Kaufman, *et al.*)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

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**Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing - Extension**

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This bill extends the termination date of the Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing from June 30, 2026, to December 31, 2028. By December 1, 2028, the workgroup must submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** The bill’s requirements can be handled with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** Chapters 442 and 443 of 2024 established the Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing, staffed by Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), to study and make recommendations regarding services, programs, advocacy, outreach, and other efforts to improve the quality of life of individuals who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing. More specifically, the workgroup must study, assess, and make recommendations regarding:

- providing direct and specialized case management services for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;

- the development and administration of programs that support educational, employment, health, and social opportunities for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- advocacy for policies, programs, and legislative initiatives that address the needs of and issues affecting deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- outreach efforts to raise public awareness and foster understanding of the challenges encountered by deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- coordination with State agencies and utilization of State resources to provide specialized case management services to meet the needs of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals;
- identification of barriers and gaps in communication access and development of solutions to improve the quality of life of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals; and
- development of activities to enhance civic engagement between deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing individuals and the community.

As necessary, the workgroup must establish subcommittees and assign members to assist in the research and preparation of the workgroup's report. In May 2025, the workgroup published its [final report](#), which noted that more research was necessary to expand on the charges of the workgroup that had not been addressed to their fullest extent.

### *Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*

ODHH was established in 2001 to promote the general welfare of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the State. ODHH must fulfill the following duties and responsibilities:

- provide, advocate, and coordinate the adoption of public policies, regulations, and programs that will benefit deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- improve access to communication and to existing services and programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- provide direct services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, as appropriate;
- increase public awareness of the needs and issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- work with State and local agencies to ensure access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to safety and emergency services;
- develop a referral service for deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- serve as an information clearinghouse on the needs and issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- increase access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to educational, health, and social opportunities;

- work with private organizations, the federal government, and other units of State government to promote economic development for deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- work to eliminate the underemployment and unemployment of deaf and hard of hearing individuals;
- provide a network through which services provided by State and federal programs serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals can be channeled; and
- promote compliance with State, local, and federal laws and policies protecting and serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

**Additional Comments:** The current termination date of the workgroup (June 30, 2026) occurs before the effective date of the bill (July 1, 2026). Nevertheless, this analysis assumes the workgroup as currently structured is maintained rather than reconstituted.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Budget and Management; Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 20, 2026  
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