

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 665 (Senator Harris)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

**Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf
and Hard of Hearing - Renaming**

This bill renames the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) to be the Office of the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing. The Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is renamed to be the Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing. The bill also makes technical and clarifying changes to effectuate the renaming of the office and council.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any costs associated with changing the name of ODHH and the council can be absorbed with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Under § 9-2401 of the State Government Article, “deafblind” means those residents of Maryland who have concomitant vision and hearing loss.

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.

Each year, the Director of ODHH must submit a report to the Governor and the General Assembly on (1) the activities of the office; (2) the status of programs and services facilitated by the office; (3) the activities of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters; (4) statistics on compliance with State and federal laws related to deaf and hard of hearing individuals; and (5) recommendations for improved delivery of services for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in ODHH meets at least quarterly, advises ODHH on carrying out its duties, and reviews statewide activities that involve deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The council also fosters coordination and support of programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals and studies ways to ensure that services and facilities are available to deaf and hard of hearing State residents.

Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing

Chapters 442 and 443 of 2024 established the Workgroup for the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing 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. The workgroup's May 2025 [final report](#) recommended, among other things, implementation of a deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing unit within ODHH to emphasize services to the deafblind community.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: HB 439 (Delegate Kaufman, *et al.*) - Government, Labor, and Elections.

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

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sj/jc

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