

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2019 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader**

Senate Bill 677 (Senator West)  
 Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs  
 and Finance

**Deaf or Hard of Hearing Individuals - Support for Parents**

This bill alters the Hearing Aid Loan Bank Program in the State Department of Education (MSDE) by (1) renaming the program and associated loan bank; (2) expanding eligibility; (3) expanding the program’s purpose and function; (4) extending specified loan periods; and (5) making conforming changes. The Governor must include an appropriation to the program in the State budget, specifically for language and communication videos to be loaned, of \$5,000 in fiscal 2021 and \$300 in fiscal 2022 and annually thereafter. A parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child is exempt from paying tuition at a public institution of higher education for any course that teaches a language or communication mode chosen to communicate with their child. Hospitals and the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDD) must provide specified information related to newborn hearing screening.

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** MSDE general fund expenditures increase by at least \$59,000 in FY 2020, as discussed below. Future years reflect ongoing and additional costs. Higher education revenues may decrease minimally beginning in FY 2020 (not reflected below). **This bill establishes a mandated appropriation beginning in FY 2021.**

(in dollars)	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	59,000	59,000	60,700	62,600	64,500
Net Effect	(\$59,000)	(\$59,000)	(\$60,700)	(\$62,600)	(\$64,500)

*Note: ( ) = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease*

**Local Effect:** Local community colleges revenues may decrease minimally beginning in FY 2020; expenditures are not materially affected.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

## Analysis

**Bill Summary/Current Law:** The bill renames the Hearing Aid Loan Bank Program the Hearing Aid and Language and Communication Video Loan Bank Program and correspondingly renames the Hearing Aid Loan Bank to be the Hearing Aid and Language and Communication Video Loan Bank.

### *Eligibility*

The bill increases eligibility for receiving services through the program to an individual younger than age 21 (rather than 18) who has not graduated from high school.

### *Program Purpose*

The bill clarifies that the purpose of the program is to lend or provide hearing aids on a temporary basis to a parent or legal guardian of an eligible individual who has no immediate access to a hearing aid to ensure that an eligible individual has maximum auditory input throughout childhood, adolescence, and into young adulthood.

The bill expands the purpose of the program to include lending or providing language and communication videos on a temporary basis and resources that may be downloaded from a website to a parent or legal guardian of an eligible individual to ensure that parents or legal guardians have (1) access to resources that provide them with unbiased information about language and communication options to use with their deaf or hard of hearing child and (2) resources to teach them the language or other means of communication that they choose to use with their deaf or hard of hearing child.

Under current law, the purpose of the program is to lend hearing aids on a temporary basis to a parent or legal guardian of an eligible child to ensure that children younger than age 18 have maximum auditory input throughout childhood and adolescence.

### *Program Functions*

The bill expands the functions of the program to include providing and maintaining specified language and communication videos to be loaned to a parent or legal guardian of an eligible individual.

Under current law, the program must provide and maintain (1) a pool of hearing aids in the loan bank to lend to a parent or legal guardian of an eligible child; (2) testing and programming equipment for hearing aids in the loan bank; and (3) supplies for repair and reconditioning of hearing aids in the loan bank.

### *Loan Periods*

Generally, the bill extends, from six months to one year, the loan period of a hearing aid to a parent or legal guardian of an eligible individual who has no immediate access to a hearing aid under the program. The bill also extends, from three months to one year, the period that the program may extend the original loan period for a hearing aid, under specified circumstances.

### *Waiver of Tuition*

For the purposes of the bill's waiver of tuition for a parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child for any course that teaches a language or communication mode at a public institution of higher education:

- “language or communication mode” means the method that a parent or legal guardian chooses to communicate with their deaf or hard of hearing child, including (1) American Sign Language; (2) cued speech, which is a system of handshapes and positions that, when combined with the mouth movements of speech, visually represent the phonemes of spoken language; and (3) listening and spoken language, in which infants and young children with hearing loss are taught to listen and talk with support from hearing technology;
- “deaf or hard of hearing child” means a minor who has hearing loss as determined through a universal newborn hearing screening or a similar screening; and
- “tuition” means the charges imposed by a public institution of higher education for enrollment in a course that teaches a language or communication mode at the institution, including charges for registration and all fees for enrolling in the course.

### *Hospital Provision of Information – Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program*

The bill requires each hospital, before discharge, to provide the parent or legal guardian of a newborn identified as having a hearing loss with a list of resources available for parents of children with hearing loss, including locations for subsequent testing and unbiased resources on language and communication mode options for communicating with their child.

Under current law, each hospital that provides obstetrical services must establish a universal newborn hearing screening program to ensure that all newborns born in the hospital are screened for hearing loss before discharge, and the results are reported as

required. The universal newborn hearing screening must consist of an auditory brain stem response test, an otoacoustic emissions test, or another appropriate screening test.

*Maryland Department of Disabilities*

MDD must regularly, but not less than one time each year, provide to each hospital in the State a list of locations where a newborn identified through a newborn hearing screening as having hearing loss may receive additional testing and unbiased resources on language and communication mode options for communicating with their child.

**Background:** The Hearing Aid Loan Bank Program in MSDE loans hearing aids on a temporary basis to the parent or legal guardian of an eligible child younger than age 18. The program must employ an otolaryngologist or a licensed audiologist. The State Superintendent of Schools must submit a report on the program by December 31 of each year. The [annual report](#) dated December 1, 2018, advised that eight families requested and received 15 hearing aids in 2018. In addition, the report noted that 13 hearing aids loaned to seven children in 2017 were used during 2018. Most loans include 2 hearing aids, providing amplification for both ears; one child required only one hearing aid.

The Insurance Article requires specified insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations providing services in the State to provide coverage for hearing aids for a minor child who is covered under a health insurance policy if the hearing aids are prescribed, fitted, and dispensed by a licensed audiologist. The benefit payable may be limited to \$1,400 per hearing aid for each hearing-impaired ear every 36 months.

**State Fiscal Effect:** General fund expenditures increase by \$58,984 in fiscal 2020, which accounts for the bill's October 1, 2019 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one part-time (50%) education program specialist to manage loaned materials, maintain up-to-date resources, and manage necessary tracking and reporting. It includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses. It also includes \$5,500 to purchase or license specified videos and other resources related to language and communication options, and \$9,960 to purchase 12 additional hearing aids (at a cost of \$830 each), as a result of the bill's expansion of eligibility for the loan bank program to age 21 and the increase in the length of the loan period.

Position	0.5
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$38,399
Hearing Aids	9,960
Videos and Other Resources	5,500
One-time Start-up Costs	4,890
Ongoing Expenses	235
<b>Total FY 2020 State Expenditures</b>	<b>\$58,984</b>

Future year expenditures reflect a full salary with annual increases and employee turnover, ongoing operating expenses, replacement costs for the hearing aids purchased in fiscal 2020, ongoing costs related to licensing videos and other resources related to language and communication options, and the mandated appropriation specified under the bill (\$5,000 in fiscal 2021 and \$300 annually thereafter).

This analysis does not include any additional costs associated with audiologist services related to the additional hearing aids.

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH), which oversees the Maryland Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program, can assist MDD in meeting the bill's requirements related to provision of information with existing resources. However, MDH advises that, while hearing screenings are performed on all newborns, the screenings do not identify newborns as having a hearing loss but rather identify which newborns require further evaluation.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** HB 1384 (Delegate Bhandari, *et al.*) - Rules and Executive Nominations.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Higher Education Commission; Baltimore City Community College; University of Maryland Medical System; University System of Maryland; Morgan State University; Department of Budget and Management; Maryland Department of Disabilities; Maryland Department of Health; Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 25, 2019  
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