

POLITICS

A telecommunications aid bill was signed into law. What does this mean for Delaware?



Olivia Montes

Delaware News Journal

Aug. 5, 2025, 4:31 a.m. ET

A bill intent on delivering telecommunications aid to Delawareans is now officially state law.

[The bill](#), which requires the Delaware Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide equipment and additional telecommunications assistance to individuals “who have deafness, hearing loss or speech disabilities related to deafness or hearing loss,” received Meyer’s signature on July 21.

The Hearing Loss Association of Delaware said [roughly 120,000 people in the state](#) have hearing loss.

While many agree this is a crucial step forward, they also point out that more needs to be done to ensure Delawareans who are deaf or hard of hearing are seen and supported.

Here’s what the law entails.

On background: [Gov. Meyer signs lead paint reform, breastfeeding programming and other health bills](#)

What's in the law?

Backed by Rep. Eric Morrison, House Bill 53 mandates the state Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provide equipment and enhance telecommunications assistance to Delawareans “who have deafness, hearing loss or speech disabilities related to deafness or hearing loss.”

This equipment includes the following devices:

- Alarm clocks and baby monitors

- Smoke detectors and emergency response kits

- Doorbells

- Telecommunications-related equipment, including compatible cell phones, pagers and phones with amplifiers.

Morrison told fellow lawmakers [this bill has been in the works](#) for some time.

“Money has been piling up” in a special fund that provides those with deafness or are hard of hearing technological support, he said. That money comes from a surcharge fee imposed by companies providing wired phones in Delaware.

The money in this fund has gone unused for the last several years, as “cell phones outdated” the technology and equipment currently in use, Morrison said.

The law also requires the Office to employ individuals to administer programming, as well as impart education and manage available resources.

The Office is also mandated to file and submit an annual report on the fund’s performance from the previous fiscal year to the governor and other officials from the House and Senate.

The report must include:

The total number of applications presented to the office.

The total number of applications approved for and denied assistance.

“The total amount of funds spent during the fiscal year.” This would include administrative and any employee-related costs.

The total amount left in the fund at the end of the fiscal year.

The law is scheduled to take effect one year after its enactment.

In other news: [What could be done? In reassessment fallout, legislative roadmap still in the works](#)

What resources are available in Delaware?

In addition to providing arrangements for sign language interpreters and information related to assistive technology, the office also handles applications for [visor communication cards](#).

These cards indicate to police officers and other personnel that a driver is deaf or hard of hearing in case of an emergency and contain instructions to “help guide the interaction and situation for a positive outcome,” according to the office’s website.

Many organizations, including [the Delaware Association of the Deaf](#) and [the Hearing Loss Association of Delaware](#), also offer links to resources, including interpreter agencies and emergency preparedness.

Director of the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Elisha Jenkins said the division – which houses the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing – is currently working to fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the bill.

This includes community outreach and working to add to their team – the latter task they hope to have completed by later this year.

What more needs to be done?

While many believe this bill serves as a key first step in the right direction, several individuals, including Feta Fernsler, feel the state is still way behind.

Fernsler, who serves as the president of the Delaware Association of the Deaf, would like to see “different projects” receive support, including ensuring quality interpreters and other resources are available across the state.

He would also like to see further funding to provide more “one-on-one communication” resources and tools for families who wish to have and foster a better connection with their children.

Having these and other resources in place not only impacts residents who are deaf or hard of hearing, but all Delawareans up and down the state.

“It’s not obvious, you know?” Fernsler said. “We’re not in a wheelchair; we’re not walking around with a cane. We don’t stand out – it’s easy to overlook us or forget about us.”

“I’m trying to get everybody to realize that we can do better,” he added.

Olivia Montes covers state government and community impact for Delaware Online/The News Journal. If you have a tip or a story idea, reach out to her atomontes@delawareonline.com.

