
By: **Senator Bromwell**

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Assigned to: Rules

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Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

Senate action: Adopted

Read second time: March 20, 2001

CHAPTER 439

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Recognition of American Sign Language**

3 FOR the purpose of establishing that American Sign Language is a recognized form of
4 communication and a fully developed language for the deaf and
5 ~~hearing-impaired~~ hard of hearing; identifying the deaf and ~~hearing-impaired~~
6 hard of hearing as a cultural minority group; defining a certain term; and
7 generally relating to the use of American Sign Language ~~by the deaf and~~
8 ~~hearing-impaired~~.

9 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
10 Article 30 - Deaf, Mute or Blind
11 Section 31
12 Annotated Code of Maryland
13 (1997 Replacement Volume and 2000 Supplement)

14 BY adding to
15 Article 30 - Deaf, Mute or Blind
16 Section 34
17 Annotated Code of Maryland
18 (1997 Replacement Volume and 2000 Supplement)

19 Preamble

20 WHEREAS, American Sign Language is a fully developed language, with
21 distinct grammar, syntax, and art forms and one of hundreds of naturally occurring
22 signed languages of the world; and

1 WHEREAS, American Sign Language is the third most common non-English
2 language spoken in the United States; and

3 WHEREAS, Maryland has over ~~80,000~~ 500,000 individuals with hearing loss
4 and American Sign Language is a language used by citizens with hearing loss,
5 citizens who are deaf-blind, or others as a means of communication; and

6 WHEREAS, The right to communicate is fundamental for all human beings,
7 because without the ability to receive and express language, the individual cannot
8 develop the most basic of human skills, including the ability to convey thoughts to
9 others, socialize, and develop basic reading and writing skills; and

10 WHEREAS, Without effective communication, the individual cannot become a
11 productive adult and is more likely to be forced to rely on government assistance,
12 which in turn increases the financial burden of the State; and

13 ~~WHEREAS, Maryland is committed to providing pertinent education programs~~
14 ~~for deaf and hearing impaired students that include American Sign Language rich~~
15 ~~environments with educational professionals proficient in American Sign Language~~
16 ~~and with an American Sign Language peer group; and~~

17 WHEREAS, Current linguistic research indicates early acquisition and fluency
18 in American Sign Language for deaf and ~~hearing impaired~~ hard of hearing children
19 enhances their mastery of English and dramatically improves their literacy skills;
20 and

21 WHEREAS, Thirty state legislatures have supported the rights of deaf and
22 ~~hearing impaired~~ hard of hearing citizens and adopted legislation recognizing
23 American Sign Language as a language, now, therefore,

24 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
25 MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

26 **Article 30 - Deaf, Mute or Blind**

27 31.

28 (A) Whenever in this article or in any other laws of this State reference shall
29 be made to the term, "deaf, dumb and blind", the same shall hereafter be taken to
30 mean "deaf, mute or blind".

31 (B) "DEAF" MEANS PERMANENT HEARING LOSS:

32 (1) THAT IS SEVERE ENOUGH TO NECESSITATE THE USE OF
33 AMPLIFICATION DEVICES TO HEAR ORAL COMMUNICATION; OR

34 (2) THAT IS SO SEVERE THAT AMPLIFICATION DEVICES ARE
35 INEFFECTIVE.

1 34.

2 (A) IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF OR
3 ~~HEARING-IMPAIRED~~ HARD OF HEARING ARE IDENTIFIED AS A CULTURAL MINORITY
4 WITH SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATION NEEDS.

5 (B) AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE IS RECOGNIZED AS A LANGUAGE SYSTEM
6 DESIGNED TO MEET THE SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF THE DEAF AND
7 ~~HEARING-IMPAIRED~~ HARD OF HEARING. AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE IS A
8 VISUAL-SPATIAL METHOD OF COMMUNICATION THAT IS A SEPARATE AND DISTINCT
9 LANGUAGE INVOLVING THE HANDS, ARMS, FACIAL MARKERS, AND BODY
10 MOVEMENTS TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS, INCLUDING THE CONVEYANCE OF
11 THOUGHTS, WORDS, EMOTIONS, AND GRAMMATICAL INFORMATION.

12 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
13 October 1, 2001.