

RE: Vote YES to HB37 and SB370 - Educational Interpreter-Certification requirements

My name is Dr. Michelle Morales, I am an educator and one of the co-writers for the Educational Interpreter certification Bill who resides in Maryland.

According to the *National Association of Interpreters in Education*, Maryland does not have the minimum state requirements for educational interpreters (National Association for Interpreters in Education, 2020).

Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) K12 students in public schools are entitled to free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and to effective communication. Public Schools are obligated to provide effective communication according to the three laws, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, *American with Disabilities Act*, and *Section 504*. Maryland always prides itself of being the most-educated state in the country. When it comes to the lack of Educational Interpreter who meets the minimum requirements, Maryland should be ashamed.

Ninety to 95% of all DHH children are born to hearing parents and most of them do not know how to communicate with their child yet. In the early years, DHH children are in the process of acquiring and developing language. By the time they arrive at schools, their language ability may not be age-appropriate. Educational interpreters who meet the minimum requirements are needed to foster language development. Educational interpreters are necessary to provide language access for instruction, incidental learning, and social emotional learning. Without communication, DHH students have nothing. When they receive poor interpreting services, they do not have access to equitable education then the problems compound every year. Deaf and hard of hearing K-12 students are not obligated to advocate for themselves regarding the qualifications of educational interpreters. Illiterateness is disabling and eventually it becomes a public health issue and a burden to society. We do not have to exacerbate this, but we inadvertently do.

This is not our first attempt. Educational Interpreters had 20 years to work on their credentials. February 1999, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) published a 26-page guideline document called, *Assuring Quality Interpreters within Education for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* written by 16 people on the advisory panel (no longer available on MSDE website, PDF available upon request). Today, out of 150 known part time/full time educational interpreters, around 10% are certified. That means 90% of the educational interpreters are unregulated and paid by public funds. Last year and two years ago, I said that it is up to us to make sure that DHH K-12 students have communication access. Since the guideline was not enforceable, we have to do something different and that is why we are here.

Our second attempt was during the legislative session 2020, sponsored by Delegate Lily Qi and 15 co-sponsors.

Our third attempt during legislative session 2021, sponsored by Delegate Qi and Senator West.

Now this is our fourth attempt, think about the Deaf and hard of hearing K-12 students, support their rights to communication access and equitable education, and vote YES to SB370.

Thank you.

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