
By: **Senator Bromwell**

Introduced and read first time: February 28, 2001

Assigned to: Rules

A BILL ENTITLED

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; identifying the deaf and hearing-impaired as a cultural
6 minority group; defining a certain term; and generally relating to the use of
7 American Sign Language by the deaf and hearing-impaired.

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

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

18 Preamble

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

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

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

27 WHEREAS, The right to communicate is fundamental for all human beings,
28 because without the ability to receive and express language, the individual cannot

1 develop the most basic of human skills, including the ability to convey thoughts to
2 others, socialize, and develop basic reading and writing skills; and

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

6 WHEREAS, Maryland is committed to providing pertinent education programs
7 for deaf and hearing-impaired students that include American Sign Language rich
8 environments with educational professionals proficient in American Sign Language
9 and with an American Sign Language peer group; and

10 WHEREAS, Current linguistic research indicates early acquisition and fluency
11 in American Sign Language for deaf and hearing-impaired children enhances their
12 mastery of English and dramatically improves their literacy skills; and

13 WHEREAS, Thirty state legislatures have supported the rights of deaf and
14 hearing-impaired citizens and adopted legislation recognizing American Sign
15 Language as a language, now, therefore,

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

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

19 31.

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

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

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

26 (2) THAT IS SO SEVERE THAT AMPLIFICATION DEVICES ARE
27 INEFFECTIVE.

28 34.

29 (A) IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF OR
30 HEARING-IMPAIRED ARE IDENTIFIED AS A CULTURAL MINORITY WITH SPECIALIZED
31 COMMUNICATION NEEDS.

32 (B) AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE IS RECOGNIZED AS A LANGUAGE SYSTEM
33 DESIGNED TO MEET THE SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF THE DEAF AND
34 HEARING-IMPAIRED. AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE IS A VISUAL-SPATIAL METHOD OF
35 COMMUNICATION THAT IS A SEPARATE AND DISTINCT LANGUAGE INVOLVING THE
36 HANDS, ARMS, FACIAL MARKERS, AND BODY MOVEMENTS TO COMMUNICATE WITH

1 OTHERS, INCLUDING THE CONVEYANCE OF THOUGHTS, WORDS, EMOTIONS, AND
2 GRAMMATICAL INFORMATION.

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