

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 586
Ways and Means

(Delegate King, *et al.*)

Education - American Sign Language - Foreign Language Credit

This bill provides that American Sign Language (ASL) must be deemed a course in foreign language for purposes of awarding academic credit and satisfying graduation requirements in public schools and public institutions of higher education.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2005.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: One-time general fund expenditures of an estimated \$100,000 would be incurred by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) in FY 2006 rather than a future fiscal year to develop a voluntary State curriculum for ASL. Higher education expenditures would not be affected. Revenues would not be affected.

Local Effect: None. Local school systems and community colleges would not be required to offer ASL courses.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Statute provides that high school graduation requirements are set by the local boards of education and the State Board of Education. As established in regulations, students must earn at least two credits of foreign language in order to graduate, or they may substitute two credits of advanced technology education or successfully complete a State-approved career and technology program.

Credit and graduation policies at public institutions of higher education are set by the governing boards of the institutions.

Background: ASL is used as the preferred means of communication for approximately 500,000 deaf individuals in the U.S. and Canada.

State Fiscal Effect: MSDE has been developing a voluntary State curriculum for all courses that are offered in public schools and is currently working on developing curricula for foreign languages. If this bill is enacted, MSDE advises that an ASL curriculum would be developed in the near future, probably fiscal 2006. Developing the curriculum would involve one-time general fund expenditures of approximately \$20,000, and an internal and external review of the curriculum would cost an estimated \$80,000. The high cost of the review is due in part to the relative uniqueness of the subject. MSDE advises that, because the course is currently being offered in three local school systems, these costs would eventually be incurred with or without the bill. This bill would simply make the development of an appropriate ASL curriculum a higher priority.

The bill would not materially affect the finances of public institutions of higher education.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: An identical bill was introduced in 1997 as SB 74. The bill received an unfavorable report from the Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, St. Mary's College of Maryland, Morgan State University, University System of Maryland, Maryland Higher Education Commission, Department of Legislative Services

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