

Delegate Qi,

I am writing to you to support House Bill 794 – Educational Interpreters Certification Requirements. As an audiologist who has worked for the past 22 years in Maryland public schools and who has experience working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing students who use sign language, I see a great need for the establishment of requirements for educational interpreters to have proficient sign language interpreting skills.

In my tenure with Calvert County Public Schools and as a member of the Maryland State Steering Committee for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students, I have witnessed a great deal of inconsistency in skill levels among educational interpreters. This inconsistency is confirmed through data collected through the administration of the Educational Interpreters Proficiency Assessment (EIPA) which documents that the average educational interpreter is only able to convey 40% of classroom instruction in sign language due to lack of adequate proficiency. This inadequate proficiency stems from lack of a gold standard during the hiring process, lack of professional development provided to our educational sign language interpreters, and a lack of recognition for those who have put in the extra time to develop their skills.

The majority of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students are born to hearing parents, and many enter the educational arena with language deficits. These language deficits often lead to academic difficulties due to problems accessing orally presented information. The primary role of an educational interpreter is critical – to provide a rich language model for the student’s language development and to provide access to academic and social information throughout the day. Although the use of educational sign language interpreters has the potential to provide additional access to language and educational information, low levels of proficiency of many educational interpreters reduce the child’s ability to develop the language skills needed for learning.

The hiring of educational sign language interpreters in some counties does not consistently require an applicant to demonstrate their skills. In those counties where a signed portion of the interview is included, this process may be conducted by individuals who are not fully proficient themselves. Certification would give hiring personnel a way to gauge an applicant’s skill set and provide greater confidence that the applicant has the skills needed to meet a student’s needs.

Educational sign language interpreters currently receive minimal support in improving their interpreting skills. Certification could provide the needed impetus for providing this continuing education, as well as reward and recognize educational interpreters who work to improve their skills.

I am hopeful that the input from a variety of stakeholders, including my own comments, will help to move this legislation forward.

Sincerely,

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