

Heather Beck
In support of HB 0794
Educational Interpreter Certification Requirement

Dear Madame Chair,

I am writing to support HB 0794, requiring Educational Sign Language Interpreters to have certain qualifications and certifications before working in the mainstream with deaf and hard of hearing students.

I have been an Educational Interpreter in Maryland for the last 20 years. I was hired with no experience and minimal qualifications. I have since been the sole provider and language model to students in an academic and social setting, in the language most readily accessible to them. Those students received less than one hundred percent access to their education because I entered the educational system with improper qualifications.

I have a six year old Deaf son who attends a school for the Deaf in Maryland and is guaranteed full access every day.

There are approximately five certified Educational Interpreters in the state of Maryland, out of approximately 150 that are currently working. I do not allow my Deaf son to attend public school because I now know the difference between an Educational Interpreter who is qualified and one who is not. The chances of him working with one of the five Interpreters with appropriate qualifications are slim.

Twenty years and many students later, I know better. More than anything, I wish I had known sooner.

Currently, the state of Maryland cannot ensure my son or any other deaf student equal access in the mainstream, due to unqualified interpreters working in education. We do not have to allow another twenty years to pass before giving these children proper access to an education. In the future, we do not have to allow new interpreters to make the same mistakes that I did and enter the system unqualified. Deaf students, acquiring language for the first time, require the most qualified interpreters.

This bill will impact me and the life of my family in many ways. It is proposed that every Educational Interpreter currently working, receive the required qualifications within seven years of this bill passing. I am one point away from the proposed required score on the Educational Interpreter Performance assessment. It will require me to pay for additional testing. At this point in my career and life, knowing what I know now about deaf education in the mainstream, I am more than willing to pay any fees necessary to better support the students I work with.

Hindsight is always 20/20.

The bill will also impact educational decisions we make for our son.

By passing this bill, we are all taking a step in the right direction for Educational Interpreters to provide full access to the deaf and hard of hearing students mainstreamed in Maryland. We have an opportunity to start these changes now.

Maya Angelou states, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

This quote resonates with me because I know better now. I wish I had known so much sooner. I know what an unqualified interpreter means to the education of deaf children in the mainstream. I see the struggles these children face on a daily basis. No child should be denied access to education. It is hard enough to go through school with all the appropriate tools handed to you.

Every time we allow an unqualified interpreter into the classroom, with no intent to change our standards, we are knowingly denying them access.

We, as interpreters, can't claim ignorance anymore. Moving forward, we must consider the ramifications our actions have regarding the success of these students in the educational setting. Passing this bill takes us one step closer to full access for deaf and hard of hearing students in the mainstream.

Thank you so much for your consideration to support this bill and by doing so, all the deaf and hard of hearing children in the state of Maryland.

Respectfully,

Heather Beck