

## **SUPPORT HB 794 Educational Interpreters**

21 February 2020

Good afternoon Members of Ways and Means,

My name is Dr. Elizabeth Ann Monn, and I am a certified teacher of the Deaf/hard of hearing in the Carroll County Public Schools. I also hold certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and the Level V Master Interpreter from the National Association of the Deaf. I hold a score of 4.0 on the elementary level of the Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment (EIPA), a test which you will no doubt be hearing a lot about today. I began my career as an educational interpreter for about 12 years before I moved on to earn a Master's degree and a teaching certificate. I work very closely with the educational interpreters in my school system. I am also the only approved EIPA Local Test Administrator in the state of Maryland.

Today I speak in support of House Bill 0794. My message is quite simple: you need to know that the skills of the interpreter have a profound impact on the educational access, and ultimately the educational success of a deaf student in a mainstream classroom. For many deaf/hard of hearing students in Maryland, the interpreter is their only language model. There are many parents of deaf children who do not know how to sign. This solitary language model is expected to not only interpret classroom instruction, but also introduce new signed vocabulary, along with interpreting all of the incidental classroom conversations that typically happen in the educational setting.

Sadly there are many educational interpreters who themselves have not reached a proficient level of fluency in American Sign Language or do not understand the conceptual nuances of signing into an English-based mode. Many interpreters have never had their skills assessed, because the state has never mandated that they be tested.

It is vital that we have an understanding of the concept of certification. Certification as an interpreter, and in this case in the specialized field of educational interpreting, means that a practitioner has met a set of minimum, entry level standards. Of course it is expected that the practitioner continue to develop and enhance skills beyond this minimum level, and it is to be understood that certification is not the apex of one's career. Certification is evidence of the interpreter's demonstration of a specific set of

skills, and can be determined by using a psychometrically valid assessment such as the EIPA or the RID certification examination.

The EIPA performance assessment rates the candidate's work on a scale from zero to five, using a rating system of four domains. Extensive, personal feedback is provided to the candidate with a list of areas of need. According to Boys Town National Research Hospital, which owns the assessment, interpreters who score a 3.5 or below should not work in the classroom without supervision. These interpreters are able to produce a basic message but are unable to interpret complex information. According to research done by EIPA's creators, interpreters at a 3.5 are able to convey only 55% of a classroom experience. 55% of an education equates to language deprivation for the deaf child.

House Bill 0794 sets the minimum standard at 3.7 (which is approximately 65-70% of the interaction) and allows the interpreter two years to work for the 4.0, which is 80% or more. Setting this bar any lower is continuing a pattern of language deprivation for the deaf students in this state.

I urge a **favorable report on House Bill 794.**

Dr. Elizabeth Monn