



MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Expanding Opportunity and Unleashing Potential

850 Hungerford Drive ♦ Room 123 ♦ Rockville, Maryland 20850

BILL: HB0794
TITLE: Education - Educational Interpreters - Certification Requirements
DATE: 2/21/2020
POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means
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The Montgomery County Board of Education (Board) **supports** HB10794 **with amendments**.

This bill specifies “educational interpreter” as an individual who provides sign language interpreting services in an educational setting (Grades kindergarten (K)–12). It requires that qualifications, regulations, and standards are established for certification of educational interpreters. It also stipulates certification renewal requirements, including professional development hours and requires that certification of educational interpreters is achieved by a certain date (July 1, 2027).

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has a long history of providing high-quality interpretation services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing, with both certified and noncertified interpreters. It is not anticipated that merely by meeting certification requirements, students will receive better services than those currently provided. Observation and evaluation by the supervisor current interpreters are better indications of quality than certification status.

Currently, sign language interpreters are not subject to certification requirements to work in a school setting. MCPS employs 36.5 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) sign language interpreters; currently only 3.0 FTEs are certified.

MCPS is the largest public school employer of educational interpreters in the state and has a long history of providing qualified sign language interpreters to students who are deaf or hard of hearing in educational settings Grades K–12. MCPS recognizes that continuous improvement and professional development is necessary and valued for all staff positions. Currently, MCPS is experiencing a severe shortage of interpreters to provide the appropriate services critical to providing access to communication and instruction. If certification becomes a requirement for a school setting, it is anticipated that it will be more challenging to attract and retain interpreters. Once certified, MCPS will increasingly be competing with private sector agencies in hiring interpreters and MCPS will experience an even greater shortage.

It is anticipated that once a current interpreter becomes certified, they may be enticed to leave MCPS for private agency employment at a significantly higher rate of pay. With a greater shortage of interpreters, MCPS will need to hire a greater number private agency contractors at a

significantly higher rate of pay than current MCPS hourly rates to meet students' needs and comply with special education mandates.

MCPS employs cued speech transliterators as well as sign language interpreters, both under the same job classification and bargaining unit; this proposed bill only includes sign language interpreters. MCPS will be required to increase salaries for cued speech transliterators to maintain pay parity with interpreters.

Proposed Amendments:

- Newly hired interpreters not meeting the certification requirements will be considered provisional and will be granted two years to meet the requirements.
- The state will establish an oversight entity and provide fiscal support for this statewide mandate.
- The state will include fiscal support to increase MCPS budget for certified interpreters' salaries.

For these reasons, the Board **supports** this legislation **with amendments** and urges a favorable report.