

1540 Ball Road
Port Republic, MD 20676
February 11, 2021

Senator Christopher West
Maryland State Senator
James Senate Office Building, Room 303
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senator West,

I am a member of the bill writing team for SB 464, and as such I have spent months with my colleagues crafting language and expectations that will ultimately benefit the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHOH) students throughout Maryland.

Currently there is no state-wide credentialing or licensing process for sign language interpreters in any profession. (Signed languages include American Sign Language (ASL), pidgin sign language, and other manual forms of communication.) Adjacent states of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, and West Virginia each have established standards which incorporate results based on an EIPA score or RID certification. Passage of SB464 will bring the educational interpreters (EIs) in Maryland up to par. I believe MSDE should be the state body involved in certifying staff who provide sign language interpreting services in k-12 education.

Students who use sign language interpreters have no guarantee that the services they receive meet any kind of standard. My team and I would like to see that changed. EIs (like teachers) would have to show acceptable results from one of two nationally-recognized entities. School systems searching for a qualified EI could use the MSDE certificate as a measure of skill. The certification would expire in 4 years, during which time EIs would continue their education by accumulating continuing education credits and improving their skills.

Research has demonstrated that an interpreter who scores at 3.7 on the EIPA provides on 70% of the information being presented. Imagine only understanding 70% of the teacher's spoken information. You would exit school with an enormous lack of knowledge. Notice, then, that a 3.7 is the initial accepted score; renewal of the certificate would require proof of improved skill! We also believe continued education will help the professional knowledge of EIs, so their performance reflects current language trends, vocabulary, and changing expectations in education.

There will be comments about the funding language in this bill; I urge you to notice how many entities provide support to teachers in the form of online trainings, university programs, professional development opportunities offered by school districts, and so forth. Similar support is lacking for EIs, and yet we are a crucial piece in the DHOH student's education. This

legislation may be the carrot on the stick, encouraging colleges and school systems to invest in quality education for EIs. We are cognizant of our role in the education of future citizens. Let all students have equal access to Maryland's public education.

I feel it is very important for an entity separate from the executive branch to manage the certifications of EIs. We want MSDE to receive data and to issue certificates. We do not wish for a group whose members report to and are selected by the Governor to manage our politically independent certification. Adding politics to the mix won't preserve the integrity of the certification process, and ultimately could compromise the gains we are making as a profession to benefit students.

You may be wondering who else thinks professional standards are a good idea. NAIE, the National Association of Interpreters in Education, is an organization of interpreters who provide services to support the communication needs of DHOH students in educational settings. While they are unable to lobby in support of any legislation, it is their mission to support best practices which benefit students. Certification is one of those practices.

I hope my written testimony encourages you to support this legislation which will improve the quality of educational interpreters in the State.

Sincerely,

Cynthia E. Gonzalez
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Member of bill writing team
Maryland resident
NAIE member
MSEA member