



The Honorable Chair Delegate Shane E. Pendergrass
The Honorable Vice Chair Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

To The Honorable Chair Pendergrass and Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk:

I write to convey the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc (RID) support for HB535- Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act. RID was established in 1964 and incorporated in 1972 as a 501 (c)(3) non-profit membership organization promoting the welfare and growth of individual interpreters as well as the profession of interpretation of American Sign Language and English. In order to promote excellence in interpreting, all interpreters should demonstrate skill, knowledge, and ability through the attainment of certification. State regulation of interpreting is a mechanism through which this goal can be more fully realized; HB535 provides that opportunity and is the result of significant collaboration between the Potomac Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (PCRID) and the Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD).

The need for state regulation of interpreters began in the early 1970s but pales in comparison to the effects produced by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was enacted in 1990. This landmark legislation transformed the face of professional interpreting and caused the demand for interpreting services to soar to unprecedented heights. The ADA defines a “qualified interpreter” as one, “...who is able to interpret effectively, accurately and impartially both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.” This definition, unfortunately, continues to cause a great deal of confusion among consumers, service providers and professional interpreters. While the definition empowers deaf and hearing consumers to demand effective communication, it provides no assistance to hiring entities (who are mandated by ADA to provide interpreter services) in determining who is “qualified” before services are provided. This is a critical point. Without the tools or mechanisms to identify who has attained some level of competency, hiring entities are ill-prepared to satisfy the mandates of ADA in locating and providing “qualified” interpreter services. State regulation of interpreters better protects all parties in an interpreted interaction.

As stated by Director Kelby Brick of the Maryland Governor’s Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, currently, Maryland is the only state that does not have any form of oversight pertaining to the profession of American Sign Language Interpreters. Nearly every state across the country is faced with the issue of



regulating the interpreting profession and practice. This is an issue of great importance considering the impact these decisions can have on the quality of service all consumers receive, as well as the state of the interpreting profession. RID supports the regulation of interpreters to ensure excellence in services delivered to the Deaf community. The impetus is now on you and the committee to pass HB535 to implement high standards that meet the professional needs of interpreters, the linguistic needs of the Deaf community, and the administrative needs of hiring entities.

RID is ready to assist the Committee should there be any questions. We also encourage the Committee to seek guidance from the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) who have long advocated for the implementation of licensure for American Sign Language Interpreters across the country.

Submitted by:

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