

HB0651/SB0464

My name is Dr. Michelle Morales. I am an educator and one of the co-writers for HB651. I am asking you to think about the children, think about the Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) K12 students in public schools. DHH students are entitled to free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and to effective communication. Public Schools are obligated to provide effective communication according to the three laws, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, American with Disabilities Act, and Section 504. Maryland always prides itself of being the most-educated state in the country. In January 2020, Maryland Fox News reported that Maryland ranked number 2 in the nation. When it comes to the qualification requirement of Educational Interpreters, Maryland has none. According to the *Registry Interpreter for the Deaf* (Registry Interpreter for the Deaf, 2020) and *National Association Interpreters in Education* (National Association Interpreters in Education, 2020), Maryland is without any kind of certification requirement for Educational Interpreters.

February 1999, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) published a 26-page guideline document called, *Assuring Quality Interpreters within Education for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* written by 16 people on the advisory panel (PDF available upon request). Today, out of 150 part time/full time educational interpreters, maybe five to 10 are certified. That means around 140 educational interpreters are unregulated and paid by public funds. If an EI was paid \$15 an hour, that is around \$30K a year, times 140 unregulated interpreters, that is around \$420,000 paid by public funds a year. Last year, I said that it is up to us caring adults like the department of education to make sure that DHH students have free and appropriate public education, but that guideline did not work. We have to do something different and that is why we are here today.

Last, ninety to 95% of all DHH children are born to hearing parents and most of them do not know how to communicate with their child yet. In the early years, DHH students are in the process of acquiring and developing language. Highly trained educational interpreters are needed to provide effective communication. Without effective communication, DHH students have nothing. When they receive poor interpreting services, they are being deprived of equitable access to education then the problems compound every year. Deprivation of education is disabling and eventually it becomes a public health issue. We do not have to exacerbate this, but we inadvertently do, because we have no standards in Maryland for educational interpreters.

Again, I am asking you to support the Deaf and hard of hearing students' needs for free and appropriate public education and effective communication. For their sake, please support this important Bill. Thank you.

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