

March 2, 2022

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Dear Education, Health and Environment Committee members,

The Potomac Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (PCRID) is writing to strongly encourage you to make sign language interpreter licensure a priority in the current legislative session. Together with the Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD), we have crafted the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act. This bill is the culmination of many years of work and careful crafting. Throughout the past two years, as we have worked to introduce this bill in the General Assembly, we have worked closely with Senator Nancy King, who has been an incredible and invaluable sponsor of this landmark legislative bill. We are equally grateful to have Delegate Heather Bagnall's incredible support on this bill.

This bill is imperative for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders as it is essentially a consumer protection bill. Interpreters are integrated in every aspect of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people's lives, from cradle to grave, literally. As such, it's crucial that when the services interpreters provide are not of quality or an ethical breach is made, there is a mechanism for redress. Currently, only nationally certified interpreters in Maryland who hold certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) have a mechanism for consumers to lodge complaints. Many people working as interpreters in Maryland don't have such certification, thus there is no way to rectify ethical issues that come up.

This is not only a consumer protection bill, however. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act mandates businesses and places of public accommodation to provide accommodations including interpreting services. In that vein, this bill also protects the business owners in Maryland who pay to provide interpreting services to their Deaf clients. An individual business can't be expected to know what constitutes a qualified interpreter when no such state licensure exists to ensure quality. The Maryland Interpreter Licensure Bill also exists in order to protect Maryland businesses and their clients from the harms that can come from a poor interpretation. In addition, it protects qualified interpreters from unscrupulous practitioners who call themselves interpreters, but have little to no training and may have only completed a basic sign language class. One egregious example of how the lack of licensure has affected the Deaf and interpreting communities happens in the court system. We have heard multiple stories from Deaf consumers and interpreters alike of certified sign language interpreters becoming Maryland court certified, accepting jobs with the Court and sending uncertified and unqualified interpreters in their stead. Worse yet, they have made badges in the same style as the court interpreter badge with the word "qualified" printed instead

of “certified” so those without knowledge of the Court’s requirements would think they were vetted. Although this has happened multiple times, without accountability on a state-wide level, nothing is done about it. This licensure bill will remedy these ethical breaches and protect both consumers and the interpreters who must work in teams with these unqualified, unethical people. In short, this is a bill that protects each member in an interpreted situation.

We know you are a governor who cares deeply about his constituents, from creating cities safe from violence, waterways safe from pollution, to making Maryland affordable for seniors. The Maryland Interpreter Licensure Bill is an extension of those priorities as it ensures that Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Marylanders are given qualified access to all aspects of their daily lives including doctor appointments, court appearances, higher education classes, hospital visits and the other minutiae of daily life.

We look forward to your support for this bill as an extension of your priorities to ensure quality of life for Marylanders all over the state. Please let us know if you have any further questions about the bill.

Thank you,



Antonio Burkett
PCRID President

CC:

Kelby Brick, Director of the Governor’s Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Senator Nancy King
Delegate Heather Bagnall
Maryland Association of the Deaf