

Dear honorable committee members,

I am writing to ask you to support, with amendments, SB748- Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2022, sponsored by Senator Nancy King and Delegate Heather Bagnall. This bill will require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the State of Maryland, ensuring the Deaf community has access to qualified interpreters.

As a sign language interpreter, I am dedicated to my profession and to providing first-class services to the Deaf Community. Unfortunately, there are those who fraudulently present themselves as interpreters without the skills and qualifications necessary to provide quality services. These people are unchecked and can harm those who rely on accurate interpretations to communicate effectively.

The fact that unqualified and fraudulent interpreters are allowed to work without proper credentials has long been overlooked and needs to be corrected. This bill requires interpreters to hold a national or regionally recognized certification or other credentials determined by the board in order to apply for a license in Maryland. The certification process will help ensure that the interpreter is qualified and adheres to a code of professional conduct. Requiring certification to apply for the license prevents fraudulent and unqualified interpreters from continuing to work in Maryland. Accountability is key, and the bill ensures that those who do not comply with the law will be held liable.

As our profession looks toward the future, the bill will allow new interpreters to hold a provisional license as they hone their skills and work toward certification and licensure. In addition, the bill provides for student interns working towards the goal of becoming a sign language interpreter to gain the necessary skills in a safe and protected environment to become qualified interpreters in the state of Maryland. Both of these measures help increase the number of interpreters in Maryland, something we urgently need.

Most importantly, the bill provides assurance to the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities with the peace of mind that interpreters will provide effective access to communication.

I work in courts. We have a need for qualified and certified interpreters in court. Currently, no subject matter experts oversee the process of authorizing qualified interpreters. The Governor's Office on the deaf and Hard of Hearing is uniquely qualified to administer this program. I have seen too many uncertified untrained interpreters in Maryland courts. This bill affects only them and will enhance Maryland's abilities to retain qualified interpreters thereby protecting the deaf community and the judiciary. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

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