



DATE: March 3, 2022 **COMMITTEE:** Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
BILL NO: Senate Bill 748
BILL TITLE: Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 748 – Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act

Bill Summary:

Senate Bill 748 establishes a State Board of Sign Language Interpreters at the Maryland Department of Labor to promote effective communications for deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing persons.

Background:

Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical disabilities, including individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs. We have specific clinics that specialize in providing services that are designed with accessibility in mind, and work with deaf and hard-of-hearing children and families.

Our Deafness-Related Evaluations and More (DREAM) Clinic and Unity Clinics, both located at the Kennedy Krieger Institute provide direct access to evaluation and treatment for children and families who use American Sign Language. Kennedy Krieger Institute houses a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Program within the Institute that ensures that our patients, families, trainees and staff access competent and qualified sign language interpretation services when needed. Kennedy Krieger Institute employs, serves, and trains deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, and utilizes the services of appropriately certified sign language interpreters.

Rationale:

At present, Maryland residents who go to get their hair cut, a manicure, or a host of other professional services are assured that their service provider has minimum competence in the service offered by the service provider. Unfortunately, deaf and hard-of-hearing Maryland residents who require access to Sign Language interpretation services are not afforded the same assurances. **Maryland does not have any licensing or regulation of sign language interpreters.** Sign language interpreters carry out crucial roles in ensuring that information is conveyed accurately and completely in healthcare and in other important settings. Certified and appropriately licensed sign language interpreters can positively impact the health and well-being of Maryland residents in ensuring their access to critical healthcare information, of particular importance during this time in our collective history when access to accurate and timely health information is more important than ever. The need for deaf and hard-of-hearing Maryland residents to easily access appropriately qualified and licensed sign language interpreters has become critically important.

Licensure of sign language interpreters is essential to ensuring that sign language interpreters are appropriately trained and credentialed so that deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals are able to access proper information, care, and communication with their healthcare providers. Licensure of sign language interpreters serves as a title protection to prevent untrained individuals from inappropriately attempting to provide these services and targeting vulnerable populations. Licensure of sign language interpreters will also provide individuals who require access to interpretation with a mechanism for ensuring appropriate preparation for the job and with recourse for individuals who are the victim of untrained and unqualified individuals providing sign language interpretation. In our opinion, lack of licensure for these trained professionals will restrict access to information and communication to deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals and their families.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 748.