

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 member of the Deaf community in Maryland, I have seen the harm caused by unqualified interpreters firsthand. Our voices are consistently set aside when fraudulent or unqualified interpreters are allowed to interpret our most vulnerable moments leaving us either without communication access or with the appearance of access, but without true parity.

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.

With this bill, the Deaf, DeafBlind, and the Hard of Hearing communities in Maryland can be greatly assured that agencies, businesses, and organizations are legally obligated to hire licensed sign language interpreters in order to provide sufficient and appropriate communication access. These interpreters will operate with the knowledge that continued possession of their licenses hinges on acceptable performance and conduct. Otherwise, they will be held accountable by the licensure board, as outlined in the bill.

I would like to put a stop to the brazenly obvious disregard these unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters have exhibited towards the communities they claim to serve in Maryland. They have waited a long time for this overdue and very necessary consumer protection bill. Thank you for your support on this important matter.

The deaf community needs a licensed interpreter to communicate with critical professionals related to medical visits, surgery procedures, hearing courts, and MD governments with trust. Saves lives!

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Deanna Tilden
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