

Testimony of Carla Mathers, Esq., Certified American Sign Language Interpreter in support of the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act (SB 0748).

This statement is in support of the pending legislation regarding licensure for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters in Maryland entitled the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act. I am in support of this consumer protection legislation for a number of reasons as explained below.

I am an attorney and an interpreter. As an attorney, I practiced in the Maryland courts regularly representing deaf and hard of hearing clients and depended on the court to provide high quality interpreting services for equitable access for my clients. Currently, I interpret primarily in court and legal settings in various jurisdictions. I have a strong interest in training and educating court and legal interpreters to provide due process protections for deaf people interacting with the judicial system. In 1994, I was appointed as one of the members of Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts' Advisory Committee on Interpreters. As a part of that commitment, I sat on the Sub-committee on Ethics and the Sub-committee on Testing and Training. I have also provided training on behalf of Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts in its Orientation to Court Interpreting Program. I know the courts are concerned about providing quality services to their stakeholders.

This legislation will improve the quality of the court interpreters (and interpreters in many other settings) in Maryland. The Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is the entity with subject matter expertise in the needs of deaf Marylanders and the qualifications of interpreters. The Office has the ability and desire to increase the number of new interpreters seeking to be qualified as legal interpreters. Additionally, many seasoned and experienced legal interpreters are eager to return to providing services for the Maryland courts.

I speak from experience as a seasoned Maryland court certified interpreter who has accepted work at Maryland courts only to find that the team interpreter was uncertified and untrained. Each time this has happened, I have informed the Court Administrator's office that the agency sent an uncertified and untrained interpreter to court. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this remains a problem. As a result, I am hesitant to accept interpreting assignments in Maryland courts. A licensure bill would only affect untrained and uncertified interpreters and unscrupulous providers.

Certified interpreters particularly in Maryland and the deaf community support licensure as it creates a baseline of qualifications and training for various specialty interpreting settings.

Further, with the management of the program by the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, those uncertified interpreters who want to professionalize will have an advocate and assistance in obtaining the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to provide quality services in Maryland.

I urge you to pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

Carla Mathers