

To Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and esteemed members of the Education, Health and Environment Committee,

I am a nationally certified ASL interpreter living and working in Maryland for the past 15 years. I am writing in support of SB748 with the senator's amendments, the Sign Language Interpreter Act. Maryland is one of only a handful of states lacking regulation of sign language interpreters. Anyone with any level of signing ability, from taking a couple ASL courses or growing up signing with relatives to degreed and certified professionals can currently interpret in Maryland. As a result, Deaf consumers in our state experience harm in a variety of ways. Unqualified interpreters at doctor's offices have misinterpreted information that leads to a lack of informed consent, treatment delays, and even a lack of understanding of terminal conditions. These same unqualified people are working in our state court system without the requisite legal knowledge or even a proficiency in ASL and English required to interpret between the languages. This lack of fluency and knowledge puts the Deaf person at a disadvantage and the hearing participants in the interaction may not have any insight into the consequences of the misinterpretations. Even when the lack of qualifications or unethical behavior is noticed, there is no recourse if the interpreter is not nationally certified. They can continue to work and perpetuate the same harm.

This bill is long overdue as a mechanism for quality control by instituting a minimum level of competency via national and regional examinations or criteria established by the licensing board for the few interpreters who may not be able to take these examinations. The addition of funding available for programs and workshops to help bridge the gap for interpreters to be licensed will also increase our pool of qualified, skilled interpreters. The Deaf community in Maryland deserves to be heard on this issue. Professional sign language interpreters deserve to be treated like the professionals they are, which means having a minimum quality standard and a mechanism for resolving complaints via licensure. I urge you to approve this bill and protect the Deaf consumers in Maryland.

Thank you,

Shelby Abdilah CI,CT
Nationally Certified ASL Interpreter