

SB748_SignLanguage_KennedyKrieger_Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Arneson

Position: FAV



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.

Testimony of Carla Mathers (SB 0748).pdf

Uploaded by: Carla Mathers

Position: FWA

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

MDIL Oral Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Gabrielle Davis

Position: FWA



Written Testimony
SB0748 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
March 3, 2022

Good Afternoon Chair Pinsky and Vice Chair Kagan. My name is Gabrielle Davis, I am the Prince George's County Association of the Deaf (PGCAD) President. I am thrilled to be here to talk with you about this important bill to our community.

This Bill is a consumer protection bill that will ensure the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community that we will have qualified interpreters. I personally heard a lot of stories from members of PGCAD about unqualified and fraudulent sign language interpreters. I am going to share with you one story.

In December of 2021, a woman had surgery and stayed in the ICU for several days. During her stay, there were several miscommunication between her, the interpreter, and Doctor/Nurses. Her daughter was there and heard and had to intervene because the interpreter did not interpret correctly. Later, we found out that this interpreter is not certified and qualified to interpret. When unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters are allowed to operate with impunity in the state of Maryland, resulting in egregious actions that have a significant effect on the communities they profess to serve, the costs are significant: physical, emotional, mental, and financial. If we had this bill, this would never happen to the woman.

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 hinge on acceptable performance and conduct. Otherwise, they will be held accountable by the licensure board, as outlined in the bill.

I am asking you to support the bill with amendment and end the unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters exhibit towards the communities they claim to serve in the State. Our communities have waited a long time for this overdue and very necessary consumer protection bill.

Thank you for your support!

Gabrielle Davis
President
Prince George's County Association of the Deaf

SB 0748 2022 Letter of Support on MDIL.pdf

Uploaded by: Leslie Puzio

Position: FWA

Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Training Programs



HB 748 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act Senate Education Health and Environmental Affairs Committee

Testimony

Submitted by,

Dr. Leslie Puzio, Program Manager, Frederick Community College

Dr. Rebecca Minor, Program Coordinator, Community College of Baltimore County

March 1, 2022

Dear Honorable Representatives:

We are writing in reference to SB 0748 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act of 2022, sponsored by Senator Nancy King, which will establish a licensure procedure for Maryland Sign Language Interpreters. We are the directors of the Community College of Baltimore County's Sign Language Interpreter Training Program and the Frederick Community College's ASL Interpreter Preparatory Program. Our programs are the only two programs in the state of Maryland that train interpreters to work with the Deaf. Deaf people need well-trained interpreters to provide them with accessibility per their rights outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act. Our programs provide students with an AAS in ASL Interpreting with the foundational skills necessary for a student to start their Interpreting profession. However, for our graduates to obtain national certification they also need to complete a baccalaureate degree or equivalent (120 college credits).

The licensing procedure established by this bill requires interpreters to obtain either a national certification through a national certification assessment provider, a regionally recognized certification assessment provider or other requirements established by the Board. Obtaining a full licensure is the ultimate goal, but this bill also allows for provisional licensure for novice interpreters (recent graduates) to obtain skills and experience to become fully licensed.

Maryland currently has no regulations which determine who can market themselves as an interpreter. Sadly, Maryland Deaf citizens often find themselves in situations where the interpreter that was hired for their appointment (doctor appointment, college class, job interview, etc.) is not qualified and in some cases has never been trained and/or does not actually know American Sign Language (ASL). Some Deaf children, who are mainstreamed in Maryland's K-12 system are being exposed to unqualified language models; stagnating their cognitive development and they have no voice.

This bill is an attempt to set up a robust licensing procedure, which will protect all Deaf individuals

(children and adults) in the state of Maryland. We support the bill as written with the following amendment:

- Removal of section 9-2435.

It is also important to acknowledge that the bill, as written, includes necessary parameters for interns in our ASL Interpreting Programs.

If you have any questions or would like more information please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Leslie Puzio *Ed.D., M.P.A, NIC*

(she/her/hers)

Assistant Professor & Program Manager

ASL Interpreter Preparatory Program

Frederick Community College

ASL Freelance Interpreter

lpuzio@frederick.edu

Rebecca Minor *PhD, NIC*

Associate Professor & Program Coordinator

Interpreter Preparation Program

Community College of Baltimore County

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Rminor3@ccbcmd.edu

Support for MDIL - SB 0748.pdf

Uploaded by: Mark Burke

Position: FWA

Hi. My name is Mark Burke, I am the owner of Streetcar 82 Brewing Co. in Hyattsville, MD. I write this letter to show my support for the Maryland Interpreter Licensure bill - SB 0748.

This bill is important as it establish a baseline of expectations for a qualified interpreter. This will assist agencies to establish regulations eliminating deceptive practices.

There are many interpreters out there and with a bill in place, it will not create a shortage but to identify qualified interpreters as well as filtering out those who are not qualified.

As a business owner, its important to me that I have a qualified interpreter to interpret for me. One example is when I had to apply for a license and face the Prince George's County Liquor Board. I had to give my testimony why we should be granted a liquor license and explained to them that we have taken all of the necessary steps to be in compliance. During my testimony, I was assured that my needs were met as the interpreter comprehend what I was signing and to voice what I said to the board. I was elated to know that my testimony went well knowing that I had the confidence in my interpreter to correctly speak what I was signing. Our liquor board license was approved.

Imagine if I had an unqualified interpreter who failed to convey what I wanted to tell the board, the liquor board license could be denied and I would have to go through the whole process again at the next meeting three months later. As a business owner, I would not be able to brew and sell beers thus losing money and potentially losing my business.

I strongly endorse Maryland Licensure bill - SB 0748.

MDAD Written Testimony SB0748.pdf

Uploaded by: MDAD President MDAD President

Position: FWA



Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony
SB0748 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
Thursday, March 3, 2022

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The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is proud of the community's work on the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act and we are excited to be in the home stretch. The Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and interpreting communities are proud to have collaborated extensively in developing this bill. We have also worked closely with Senator Nancy King, and Delegate Heather Bagnall who have been incredible and invaluable sponsors of this landmark legislative bill.

Governor Hogan once said that "...saying 'we are open for business' isn't just a catchy slogan on road signs. It actually defines our mission." Part of that mission is ensuring businesses, agencies, contractors, and the like in certain industries provide quality products and services with the knowledge that they will be held accountable for wrongdoings, abuse, and/or fraud. When unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters are allowed to operate with impunity in the state of Maryland, resulting in egregious actions that have a significant effect to the communities they profess to serve, the costs are significant: physical, emotional, mental, and financial (one Deaf married couple in Montgomery County racked up nearly \$40,000 in medical expenses due to unqualified sign language interpreters' ineffective skills at providing suitable communication access with their doctors).

The challenges of ineffective communication access provided by unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters can literally be a matter of life or death—critical information is either not appropriately relayed or omitted entirely. MDAD has heard dozens upon dozens of these types of stories from not only our members, but the community at large. The harmful repercussions have a far reaching and chilling effect on the quality of life for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Maryland citizens.

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 hinge on acceptable performance and conduct. Otherwise, they will be held accountable by the licensure board, as outlined in the bill.

We would like to put a stop to the brazenly obvious disregard these unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters exhibit towards the communities they claim to serve in Maryland. Our communities have waited a long time for this

overdue and very necessary consumer protection bill. On their behalf, MDAD strongly encourages you to favor this important bill with the amendment.

Thank you in advance for your support.

MDAD Board of Directors

SB748_michelewestfall_fwa.pdf

Uploaded by: Michele Westfall

Position: FWA

SB748
Favorable With Amendments
Michele Westfall

March 3, 2022

Dear Senators Pinsky and Kagan,

My name is Michele Westfall and I'm the chair of the Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH). I'm submitting my written testimony on SB748, and my position on this bill is Favorable With Amendments, because Maryland's Deaf and Hard of Hearing community has wanted a licensing and regulatory system for American Sign Language interpreters in Maryland for so many years, to provide consumer protection for all Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders from bad, untrained, or unqualified interpreters.

Last year, I provided oral and written testimonies on a previous version of this bill because it had issues. This time around, I am happy to say that I support this bill with amendments. Please pass this bill with amendments.

Thank you,

Michele Westfall
Chair, Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

SB0748-663228-01 Amendments.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Nancy King

Position: FWA



SB0748/663228/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

10 FEB 22
14:29:48

BY: Senator King

(To be offered in the Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 748

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 22, strike “9–2436” and substitute “9–2435”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 25, strike in their entirety lines 6 through 12, inclusive.

SB748 King Sponsor Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Nancy King

Position: FWA

NANCY J. KING
Legislative District 39
Montgomery County

MAJORITY LEADER

Budget and Taxation Committee

Chair
Education, Business and
Administration Subcommittee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 748 – Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act

March 3, 2022

Mister Chairman and Members of the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee:

There are over one million people in Maryland who are Deaf or hard of hearing, but Maryland is one of the very few states in the country that does not require standards or licensing requirements that would offer protection from unqualified or fraudulent interpreters. Unqualified interpreters can cause irreparable harm to an individual, especially in medical and legal settings.

The legislature has recognized that this is problematic and in the 2020 Joint Chairmen's Report (JCR), they requested that the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) provide a response on "ways to protect and serve users of sign language interpreting services." The GODHH responded with a thirteen page report and five different strategies. Their report can be found at: [2020_p18_GODHH_Interpreters.pdf \(maryland.gov\)](#).

One of the strategies mention in the report is creation of licensing for sign language interpreters. Twenty two states in the country have licensing requirements for sign language interpreters. Senate Bill 748 – Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act – will set the framework for licensing in Maryland. I am also introducing one amendment that removes criminal penalties from the legislation and conforms the bill to the House cross-file.

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Maryland deserve sign language interpreters who have the proper training and qualifications for the job and so I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 748 with amendments.

PCRID letter of support SB748.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

March 2, 2022

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Lucas King
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Dear Education, Health and Environment Committee members,

The Potomac Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (PCRID) is writing to strongly encourage you to make sign language interpreter licensure a priority in the current legislative session. Together with the Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD), we have crafted the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act. This bill is the culmination of many years of work and careful crafting. Throughout the past two years, as we have worked to introduce this bill in the General Assembly, we have worked closely with Senator Nancy King, who has been an incredible and invaluable sponsor of this landmark legislative bill. We are equally grateful to have Delegate Heather Bagnall's incredible support on this bill.

This bill is imperative for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders as it is essentially a consumer protection bill. Interpreters are integrated in every aspect of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing people's lives, from cradle to grave, literally. As such, it's crucial that when the services interpreters provide are not of quality or an ethical breach is made, there is a mechanism for redress. Currently, only nationally certified interpreters in Maryland who hold certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) have a mechanism for consumers to lodge complaints. Many people working as interpreters in Maryland don't have such certification, thus there is no way to rectify ethical issues that come up.

This is not only a consumer protection bill, however. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act mandates businesses and places of public accommodation to provide accommodations including interpreting services. In that vein, this bill also protects the business owners in Maryland who pay to provide interpreting services to their Deaf clients. An individual business can't be expected to know what constitutes a qualified interpreter when no such state licensure exists to ensure quality. The Maryland Interpreter Licensure Bill also exists in order to protect Maryland businesses and their clients from the harms that can come from a poor interpretation. In addition, it protects qualified interpreters from unscrupulous practitioners who call themselves interpreters, but have little to no training and may have only completed a basic sign language class. One egregious example of how the lack of licensure has affected the Deaf and interpreting communities happens in the court system. We have heard multiple stories from Deaf consumers and interpreters alike of certified sign language interpreters becoming Maryland court certified, accepting jobs with the Court and sending uncertified and unqualified interpreters in their stead. Worse yet, they have made badges in the same style as the court interpreter badge with the word "qualified" printed instead

of “certified” so those without knowledge of the Court’s requirements would think they were vetted. Although this has happened multiple times, without accountability on a state-wide level, nothing is done about it. This licensure bill will remedy these ethical breaches and protect both consumers and the interpreters who must work in teams with these unqualified, unethical people. In short, this is a bill that protects each member in an interpreted situation.

We know you are a governor who cares deeply about his constituents, from creating cities safe from violence, waterways safe from pollution, to making Maryland affordable for seniors. The Maryland Interpreter Licensure Bill is an extension of those priorities as it ensures that Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Marylanders are given qualified access to all aspects of their daily lives including doctor appointments, court appearances, higher education classes, hospital visits and the other minutiae of daily life.

We look forward to your support for this bill as an extension of your priorities to ensure quality of life for Marylanders all over the state. Please let us know if you have any further questions about the bill.

Thank you,



Antonio Burkett
PCRID President

CC:

Kelby Brick, Director of the Governor’s Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Senator Nancy King
Delegate Heather Bagnall
Maryland Association of the Deaf

SAbdilah letter of support Senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

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

SB748 ARose.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

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.

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

Sincerely,

Anna S. Rose
askakel@yahoo.com

SB748 CMathers.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

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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,

Carla Mathers
carla.mathers@gmail.com

SB748 DGriffiths.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

Dear honorable committee members,

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

Sincerely,

Dori Griffiths
askfor@dorigriffiths.com

SB748 JBell.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

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.

As an interpreter, I am looking forward to the passage of this bill. The quality of interpreting services in MD is paramount to communication access for deaf Marylanders. Interpreter licensure is an excellent way to be sure that this happens. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bell
aslterp@gmail.com

SB748 JPalmer.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

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.

I'm a certified sign language interpreter and Research Associate with the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes — a technical assistance and dissemination center funded by US Department of Education. We conducted a root cause analysis and found that lack of qualified professionals is one of the largest barriers for deaf people seeking employment and postsecondary education. Establishing state-level interpreting standards is a crucial step to improving professionalism amongst services providers for the deaf.

<http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/rootcauses>.

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.

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

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeffrey Levi Palmer
jeffrey@nationaldeafcenter.org

SB748 KMitchell.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,

Kelsey Mitchell
kemomi@gmail.com

SB748 BBarron.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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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.

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

Sincerely,
Brian Barron
bjbarron13@aol.com

SB748 BDelahoussate.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,
Blaise Delahoussate
wolfrog65@yahoo.com

SB748 GDavis.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,
Gabrielle Davis
GDavis3115@gmail.com

SB748 JLeffler.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,
Jacob Leffler
JLeffler24@gmail.com

SB748 jsimmons.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,
Juliet Simmons
juliet@isimmons.net

SB748 KHedberg.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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

Sincerely,
Karl Hedberg
sweducks@yahoo.com

SB748 LStoltz.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. Our organization, Maryland Deaf Community Center, supports this bill.

Sincerely,
Linda Stoltz
Linda.Stoltz@deafmdcc.org

SB748 NMoran.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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As a Deaf homeowner at the Woodmore Towne Centre with 3 children of which 2 are also Deaf, we appreciate the amenities of Prince George's County such as PG Parks and Rec. Each time we sign up for an activity, we request ASL interpreters. Each time, our request was filled with ASL interpreters. We appreciate this. However, situations in PG County have come up over the years of questionable actions on the part of the agencies that provide ASL interpreters. At times they send unqualified interpreters for high-stakes appointments such as courts and medical reasons. There is NO mechanism for the Deaf consumers to file a complaint/grievance against unqualified interpreters/unethical agencies. There is also NO mechanism of protecting Deaf consumers from unqualified interpreters/unethical agencies. For instance, if I had a negative experience with an interpreter, then the same interpreter is assigned to me again. I do not have any recourse but to accept the same interpreter. This is not fair nor ethical. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Norma Moran
viva2nym@gmail.com

SB748-BHartman.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,
Becky Conley-Hartman
Fbakebh50@gmail.com

Stephanie Summers letter to committee.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

To Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and the members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I represent the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Licensure team under the Maryland Association of the Deaf. I am writing in favor of SB748 with amendments. Over the past several years, we've collaborated with a variety of groups reflecting the diversity of our community to bring this bill together to protect deaf consumers and our interpreters in their highest regards of the profession.

As you may know, in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law, requiring qualified interpreters to be provided for any business providing services to the public. Unfortunately, without federal or state requirements for qualification, people who simply know some sign language, but lack the training in interpretation are working in high stakes situations and causing undue harm to the Deaf community. Many of us saw an example of these situations in 2017 in Florida when a signer was put on the news stations warning of Hurricane Irma and instead warned of a pizza bear monster. Without critical information being relayed, Deaf people remained in harm's way. This was a very visible example of something that happens daily in the state of MD in college classes, courtrooms, physicians offices, hospitals and job interviews. SB748 is, at its heart, a consumer protection bill.

The bill not only licenses interpreters, but also contains a provision to develop regulations for agencies. This is an important provision because there are agencies out there using deceptive practices to fill jobs with unqualified interpreters. At times these interpreters are not given the information necessary to determine whether they are qualified. Yet, they bear the brunt of the penalty unless agencies also face regulation. Agencies will be part of the process for developing these regulations to make sure their voices are heard as well.

Although adding a layer of regulation, this bill will not create a shortage of qualified interpreters. The intention of this bill is to increase the pool of skilled interpreters in Maryland. To those ends, there are provisions for the establishing of supplemental workshops and programs to help interpreters, especially historically marginalized groups, become licensed. The only interpreters who will be filtered out are those doing harm by working while not qualified for the job.

The bill contains no grandfather clause for signers who have been working for years because some of these signers are the reason we need this bill. Some have been practicing in the profession for a long time as unskilled interpreters doing harm. Those who are skilled will be able to get a license via one of the 3 mechanisms for qualifying for licensure. The large majority of interpreters will be licensed by virtue of national or regional certification. For the minority who are not able to take the exam, the Board will establish criteria to show a minimum competency.

There are businesses in Maryland that already follow the practices outlined in this bill. Many of the reputable interpreting agencies employ only certified interpreters or those who have met a minimum criteria for qualification. They believe in the spirit of what we are proposing.

Maryland businesses in general will also benefit from this bill as it takes the guesswork out of hiring a qualified interpreter and prevents miscommunications that can lead to legal action or harm to both parties. The businesses or agencies who would oppose the bill are the ones who have been hiring non-qualified, non-certified, and in some instances, fraudulent interpreters for purely financial reasons. The practice is being done because there is a lack of regulation or enforcement of such and there are no consequences.

We Deaf people live with the reality that our voices might never be truly heard. This bill provides a way for the state to recognize protections that ensure we don't lose that opportunity before we even get a chance to try. Because of the current lack of consumer protection, there have been cases where medical and legal ramifications have been permanent and life-changing. There is no telling the countless voiceless that have suffered from this lack of protection.

I'd like to leave you with some statistics from the state of Maryland:

468 Certified Interpreters: Live in Maryland

124 Certified Interpreters: Live in DC

82 Certified Interpreters: Live in North Va

25 Certified Interpreters: Live in Del

Total nationally certified Interpreters Available to Serve Maryland from Region: 699

This number doesn't include those who are eligible for a provisional license or for a full license by meeting other criteria. This is the largest number of qualified interpreters clustered in one region in the entire country.

I ask you to help Maryland get back on track by joining the 40+ other states who already have some form of interpreter regulation. Help us protect Deaf and hearing consumers from undue harm by fraudulent signers and set a minimum standard for working interpreters.

Stephanie Summers

SB748 ARoehrig.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,

Arthur Roehrig

art.roehrig43@gmail.com

SB748 dtilden.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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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
dtilden86@gmail.com

SB748 FHartman.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Fred Hartman
fhartman6@gmail.com

SB748 G Steingeiser.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

Dear honorable committee members,

I am writing to ask you to support 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.

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

Sincerely,

Grace Steingeiser
graces2@peponline.org

SB748 GEdwards.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,
Gail Edwards
gatormom24@gmail.com

SB748 JMeadows.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Sincerely,
Jimmy Lee Meadows
moeyturk1@gmail.com

SB748 JWeinstock.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. As a proud Deaf woman, I use American Sign Language and written English to be a full participant of society. It would mean a great deal to me to know that the state of Maryland where I reside for 44 years allows me full access to information. Thank you, in advance, for your support for this bill.

Sincerely,

Janet Weinstock

janetweinstock13@gmail.com

SB748 LKatz.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. And thank you for supporting the Sign Language Bill which will protect me and other deaf people with using licensed interpreters.

Sincerely,
Lizbeth R. Katz
lkatz96@gmail.com

SB748 MLLally.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. We deaf people need qualified interpreters that are certified to protect all parties involved in the interpreting situation. Thanks.

Sincerely,
Mary Lynn Lally
deafhugs@aol.com

SB748 MOhara.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FWA

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

Sincerely,
Mary O'Hara
failte.molly@gmail.com

sb748.pdf

Uploaded by: Sara Elalamy

Position: UNF

**MARYLAND JUDICIAL CONFERENCE
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Hon. Joseph M. Getty
Chief Judge

187 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 748
Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
DATE: February 16, 2022
(3/3)
POSITION: Oppose

The Judiciary opposes Senate Bill 748. The bill would establish a licensing and regulatory system for sign language interpreters under a newly created State Board of Sign Language Interpreters in the Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The bill will have a significant operational impact on the Judiciary. The Maryland Judiciary operates a large Court Interpreter Program, providing in-person interpreters for court events and services throughout the State. In Fiscal Year 2021, the Program provided in-person interpreters for 13,152 events. In Fiscal Year 2021, 6% (816) of those assignments were for American Sign Language services. The use of court interpreters decreased during Fiscal Years 2021 and 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 health emergency. Fiscal Year 2019 represents a more typical year. During Fiscal Year the Program provided in-person interpreters for 15,558 court events, of which 8.5% (1,336) were for ASL services.

The Program maintains a Maryland Court Interpreter Registry of those eligible to serve in the Maryland courts. Maryland Rule 1-333 requires that courts assign an interpreter from the registry when possible. The court may appoint a non-registry interpreter only if a registry interpreter is not available. The Maryland Court Interpreter Program requires new ASL interpreters be certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). (Some ASL interpreters on the Registry hold a certification from the National Association of the Deaf although that organization no longer provides certification. Maryland Rule 1-333 permits ASL interpreters to have either certification).

The Maryland Judiciary provides extensive information about its language services in an annual report, *Language Services in the Maryland Courts – FY2021*, available at:
<https://www.mdcourts.gov/sites/default/files/import/accesstojustice/pdfs/languageservicesreportfy21.pdf>.

The bill may reduce the pool of certified sign language interpreters allowed to serve in court proceedings and for court services, which may increase the cost of providing the service. The bill as drafted would require the Judiciary to assign only ASL interpreters licensed by the Board. The Board will not be providing testing or certification itself, but will determine the licensing requirements for interpreters in a legal setting. The bill provides for a provisional license for those

who do not meet the full qualifications, but provisional licensees are precluded from serving in a legal setting under the bill.

Most of the ASL interpreters on the Judiciary's Registry have a National Interpreter Certification (NIC) from the RID. Some may have older certificates which are no longer issued (Certificate of Interpretation (CI) or Certificate of Transliteration (CT)). In the past, RID issued a legal specialty certification (SC:L) but that was put on moratorium in 2016. As a result, there is a shortage of interpreters who currently hold a legal specialty certification. There are few, if any organizations certifying that ASL interpreters have expertise in a legal setting.

Some courts experience difficulty securing ASL interpreters on a timely basis when needed. This is especially true in rural jurisdictions and for District Court commissioners after hours. A reduction in the pool may lead to additional postponements or require key services to be rescheduled, resulting in delays in bringing cases to disposition. A reduced pool of ASL interpreters may also result in an increase in the hourly rate the Judiciary must pay to secure ASL services. The Judiciary typically pays \$65 – \$75 for ASL services. Because it is unclear how many interpreters will be licensed and available to serve in a legal setting, it is impossible to estimate the operational and fiscal impact of a reduction in the pool.

The Maryland Judiciary has several mechanisms in place to ensure quality assurance of all court interpreters including ASL interpreters.

Handbook and Code of Conduct. Interpreter policies are outlined in the Maryland Court Interpreter Handbook and all interpreters on the Maryland Court Interpreter Registry are required to provide a signed acknowledgement that they have received and understand the policies in the Handbook, including the Maryland Code of Conduct for Court Interpreters.

Complaint Protocol and Forms. The Maryland Judiciary provides a complaint procedure and forms the public and judges and court staff can use to report a concern about a Registry interpreter. That information is available on the Judiciary's website. All complaints are fully investigated by staff and reviewed by a subcommittee of the Maryland Judicial Court Access & Community Relations Committee.

Grievance Procedure. In addition, deaf and hard of hearing individuals concerned about the quality of an accommodation provided by the Maryland courts can submit a grievance through the Office of Fair Practices. The procedure and forms are available on the Judiciary website.

Accommodations Page and Court Accessibility Toolkit. The Judiciary provides a public web page to aid individuals seeking an [accommodation](#). In addition, the Judiciary maintains a comprehensive [Court Accessibility Toolkit](#) to aid judges, magistrates, and court staff in responding effectively to the needs of persons with disabilities. Several resources directly address how courts can provide appropriate accommodations for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The bill may restrict the Judiciary's use of interpreters in a Video Remote Interpreting Setting, applications which have become increasingly important during the COVID-19 health emergency. The bill defines "video remote interpreting setting" and would require licensing in a legal setting, including a video remote setting. The Maryland Judiciary uses video remote interpreting in two contexts. The Judiciary currently provides remote ASL service with an ASL provider. This is often used for interactions with court staff, commissioners, or outside the courtroom setting. We use a vendor, Birnbaum, to provide this service. Under the bill, the court's vendor would be required to provide only interpreters approved by the Maryland Board.

The Judiciary has also pivoted during the COVID-19 health emergency to make extensive use of video technology to facilitate remote court proceedings. Maryland court interpreters regularly

participate in these proceedings. When those interpreters are providing ASL service, this would fall under the definition of “video remote interpreting” as defined in the act.

If all legal settings require ASL interpreters be licensed by the state, the bill will have a significant operational and fiscal impact on the Judiciary. It may preclude the use of the existing remote ASL contract. Remote ASL is used to permit court staff to speak with deaf or hard of hearing individuals who seek assistance at the court. Requiring remote providers to have a Maryland license will reduce the number of vendors available to provide the service, which may increase the cost of the service. In the alternative, it may eliminate the Judiciary’s ability to use the service and may require that deaf and hard of hearing individuals return to the court at a later time when an in-person interpreter can be scheduled. It would also limit the ability of the court to use its current pool of Registry interpreters for remote court proceedings.

The bill would restrict access to justice by making it more difficult for individuals to secure qualified ASL interpreters in order to meet with counsel or participate in a broad range of legal proceedings. The bill has broad applicability and would apply to meetings between attorneys and their clients. ASL services are expensive and special licensing requirements will reduce the number of individuals who can provide the service in those contexts and increase the cost. Requiring special certification for those types of meetings may impede or delay individuals from seeking the assistance of counsel or from getting legal help from a hotline or legal service provider.

The Judiciary would have to pay for information about interpreter status. The Board would be empowered to charge a fee to confirm the licensing status of individual interpreters.

The court enforcement provisions would interfere with existing court processes and standards. The bill provides that a party who receives sign language services from an individual in violation of the title, or a person who witnesses the service, may bring an action seeking an injunction to prohibit the individual from providing sign language interpretation services. The bill sets standards and penalties under this provision. These provisions of the bill would override established procedures and standards for injunctions delineated in Title 15, Chapter 500 of the Maryland Rules.

The bill would create additional standards for ASL interpreters already provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and corresponding federal regulations. Title II of the Act addresses government services and requires that communications with “applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions” with disabilities be as effective as communications with others. (28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1)). Federal regulations require that public entities “furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to afford individuals with disabilities. . . an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of a service, program or activity of a public entity.” (28 C.F.R. § 35.160). These auxiliary aids and services may include, where necessary interpreters, written materials, qualified readers, large print materials, as well as equipment or devices that must be acquired or modified.

The Judiciary would be excluded from determining the requirements for a legal setting. There is no provision for a representative from the Judiciary to participate on the Board. Also, all Board members must be fluent in American Sign Language.

The bill would impede judicial independence. The Judiciary administers the judicial system and sets standards for professionals serving in the Maryland courts. The bill grants authority for regulating ASL interpreters serving in a court setting to an Executive Branch agency which would

erode the separation of powers. The Judiciary has a strong interpreter program which has adopted and uses examinations and standards developed by the Council of Language Access Coordinators of the National Center for State Courts. If the State were to assume authority for regulating ASL interpreters, it may, at some point in the future, impose regulations for foreign language interpreters on the courts, which would be a further erosion of the separation of powers.

The bill would authorize individuals to elect whether they want services provided remotely or in person. This would abridge the ability of the courts to manage its own dockets and to schedule proceedings in a manner designed to protect public health.

cc. Hon. Nancy King
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor