

SB346_SignLanguage_KennedyKrieger_Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Arneson

Position: FAV



Kennedy Krieger Institute

DATE: February 14, 2023 **COMMITTEE:** Education, Energy and the Environment
BILL NO: Senate Bill 346
BILL TITLE: Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 346 – Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act

Bill Summary:

Senate Bill 346 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 356.

GODHHtestimonySB0346HB0260.pdf

Uploaded by: Kelby Brick

Position: FAV

Wes Moore
Governor



Kelby Brick
Director

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor

**GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE
DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

**SB 346 MARYLAND SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS ACT
HB 260 MARYLAND SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS ACT**

**MARYLAND GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
DIRECTOR KELBY BRICK, ESQ., CDI**

**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
February 14, 2023**

**HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Delegate Ariana B. Kelly, Vice Chair
February 22, 2023**

Greetings Chair and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Kelby Brick. I am an attorney and a certified interpreter. I am honored to be here on behalf of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) as its director to provide testimony to support the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act.

The bill in front of us today, the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act (HB260/SB346), aims to establish a licensing and regulatory system for sign language interpreters under the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters in the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH). The bill also mandates the development of programs to assist licensure of marginalized interpreters, the development of mentorship programs and the creation of financial assistance for certain applicants.

Make no mistake, this bill is a civil rights bill as well as a consumer protection act. Bad actors have preyed on the Deaf community, exploiting them, and harming them for their own benefit. We need you to act today to stop such exploitation.

As the legislature has reported in its current budget analysis of GODHH, "Unlike 48 other states, Maryland has neither statewide standards nor a regulatory body to provide oversight over ASL interpretation services." We stand alone with Florida in the absolute lack of oversight of the sign language interpreting profession.

Lack of interpreter qualifications and fraudulent interpretation for Maryland's Deaf and hard of hearing residents happens all too often in many settings including courts, government offices, schools, hospitals, and places of employment. These harms Deaf and hard of hearing people while isolating them from the larger community and workplace.

Business owners, places of public accommodations (such as hospitals), schools, and Deaf consumers have frequently complained about the harm incurred by fraudulent or unqualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. A fraudulent or unqualified ASL interpreter is typically a malfeasant actor who poses as an ASL interpreter with little to no training, competency, and fluency in the language. Consistent with the approach taken by other states, this legislative bill enacts a licensing requirement for such interpreters to protect the public's health, safety, and welfare.

The harm incurred by fraudulent and unqualified interpreters have cost consumers and businesses hundreds of thousands of dollars. Lawsuits have resulted from such harm. Fraudulent and unqualified interpreters in courts, government, schools, hospitals, and many other settings can cause significant harm to Deaf and hard of hearing constituents by failing to convey information and effectively isolating Deaf and hard of hearing constituents from their community at large, while preventing service providers to be able to provide effective services.

Nearly all other states have regulations governing sign language interpreters. The scope of each state varies. Some states do actual assessment of interpreters' skills, fluency, and competency in the language; others do not do assessments but rather verification of specified criteria required for licensure.

Because Maryland does not have any regulation on sign language interpreters, many fraudulent and unqualified sign language interpreters who are unable to pass qualifications for licensure in neighboring states come to Maryland, preying on our most vulnerable residents. The neighboring states are Virginia, West Virginia, Washington D.C., Pennsylvania, and Delaware, all with some sort of regulations of varying scope in place. Consequently, qualified interpreters and hiring agencies that provide qualified interpreters are outcompeted by unqualified and fraudulent interpreters, harming their businesses.

GODHH has been consistent in advocating for communication access for 1.2 million Deaf and hard of hearing Marylanders and this has included the provision of qualified and skilled sign language interpreters and captioning for governor press briefings and the Governor's State of the State Address as you may have seen earlier this month.

Maryland has been recognized as one of the top three states in providing access to COVID information via public TV broadcasts using American Sign Language interpreters and captioning in real time. A different study found that Maryland received top scoring based on our use of ASL and captioning in our vlogs and press announcements related to the pandemic. In our transition

reports we emphasized the importance of maintaining the top notch ASL and captioning access that many states have modeled after ours.

We are able to do all that for the Governor, but everyone deserves the same access for critical and yet mundane events in their lives. Being able to tell their doctor what is happening with their bodies. Being able to understand what is happening in the courtroom. Being able to discuss tasks with their employers. Those are things we take for granted every day, but the average Deaf person walks into those situations everyday having no idea if the so-called interpreter who shows up is qualified or yet another exploiter.

This needs to end immediately. You have the power to end this injustice.

A similar bill passed the House last year but ran out of time in the Senate. Please support and pass this bill this year to protect consumers while advancing their civil rights.

Thank you

Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act

Uploaded by: Leslie Puzio

Position: FAV

SB 0346 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
Environment Energy and Education Committee

Testimony Submitted by,
Dr. Leslie Puzio
Certified ASL/English Interpreter

February 13, 2023

Dear Honorable Representatives:

I am writing in reference to SB 0346 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act of 2023, sponsored by Senator Nancy King, which will establish a licensure procedure for Maryland Sign Language Interpreters. I am a nationally certified ASL/English Interpreter and have been working professionally in the field for over 18 years, I have served in multiple roles at various interpreting agencies and on various non-profit or volunteer committees related to sign language interpretation, I have served on the local Registry of Interpreter board, I am currently serving on the Maryland Interpreter Licensure Bill committee and serve as the Program Manager and faculty member for the ASL Interpreter Preparatory Program at Frederick Community College. There are only two programs in the state of Maryland that train interpreters to work with the Deaf and they are The Community College of Baltimore County and Frederick Community College. Deaf people need well-trained interpreters to provide them with accessibility per their rights outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act. Those programs provide students with an AAS in ASL Interpreting with the foundational skills necessary for a student to start their Interpreting profession. It is important to acknowledge that the bill, as written, includes necessary parameters for interns in the ASL Interpreting Programs.

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. I support the bill as written.

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, EIPA*
(she/her/hers)
ASL Freelance Interpreter
Assistant Professor & Program Manager (ASL Interpreter Preparatory Program)
leslie.aslterp@gmail.com - 240-578-0342

InSupportofSB0346-MDIL.pdf

Uploaded by: Mark Burke

Position: FAV

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mark Burke and I'm the owner/head brewer of Streetcar 82 Brewing Co in Hyattsville. We are proud to be a Deaf-owned and operated brewery.

I write in support of SB0346 the Maryland Interpreter Licensure bill. This bill is important as the Deaf/Hard of Hearing consumers have the right to qualified/certified interpreters. In the event, the interpreter's performance was unsatisfactory the consumer need to have the opportunity to report a complaint.

I testified in person last year but was disappointed that the bill did not go through. I will continue to push on this until its passed.

Last October Brooke Kidd, with Joe's Movement in Mount Rainier, contacted me and let me know about a Rock Opera/Play performance that will be ASL interpreted. Ms. Kidd was excited about doing this to make this event accessible to the Deaf especially with the close proximity of Streetcar 82 Brewing Co. I was on board and bought tickets for myself and my friends.

My friends and I all went out to dinner and then head to the show. When we arrived, we first met Eli one of the two interpreters. I had a hard time understanding Eli as I thought she was trying to be theatric and I didn't say anything. Roz then appeared and she introduced herself and I understand her just perfectly.

We all went to our seats and were excited to be watching the show. The two interpreters worked together as a team where they will alternate. Eli started first and I was having difficulty understanding her and then when it was Roz's turn I understood her just fine then back to Eli where I struggled to understand her again and I asked my friends if you are understanding what she said they said no. At intermission, I went out to the lobby and ran into a hearing friend and Eli saw me and quickly came over to interpret for me but she couldn't comprehend what I was trying to say to my friend. I turned to my friend and told him I needed to go and took off as she was making it worse.

I went back to my seat and was eager to get the second half of the show started, I saw Eli drinking out of a clear plastic cup then it hit me maybe she is drunk. There was a bar in the lobby where people could buy alcoholic drinks. Eli was up first and a few minutes in, I turned to my friends and said she is really drunk. Eli then abruptly walked off to the lobby and Roz quickly jumped in and took over the interpreting. Eli then returned and tried to resume interpreting, my friend told her to sit down and let Roz interpreted the rest of the show. Eli was disturbed and quickly slumped down in her seat. It was right there we can see that she was really drunk by her body language and etc. We were immediately turned off. Roz interpret the rest of the show and we actually enjoyed the show more with her. It was discussed with my friends that I would reported this to Brooke that this interpreter Eli was drunk.

As soon as the show ended, Brooke immediately walked to Eli and both had a few minutes conversation and Eli then left abruptly. Brooke came and apologized to me and my friends about this unfortunate incident. Brooke said that she would contact the interpreting agency about this.

We were a paying customer and having to shelled out our money, this interpreter Eli ruined our experience.

I later learned that this same interpreter Eli is still interpreting as one of my friends who went to the show, her sister recognize the name. She was interpreting for the Prince George's County Council meeting on Zoom.

I was shocked to learned that she is still able to interpret, I do not know what her consequence was with the agency whom she worked for when she did the show. She was likely to have been hired as a freelance interpreter. This is why we need this interpreter licensure bill SB 0346. The bill will allow us to report and also to hold interpreters and interpreting agencies accountable.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at mark@streetcar82.com.

Sincerely,

Mark Burke
Streetcar 82 Brewing Co.
Hyattsville, MD

SB346_MACDHH_Westfall_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Michele Westfall

Position: FAV

SB346
Favorable

Senator Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

February 13, 2023

Dear Chair Feldman,

My name is Michele Westfall, and I'm the chair of the Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MACDHH). MACDHH advises the Maryland Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing on matters and issues affecting the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind communities.

It is vitally important that all Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Marylanders are protected as consumers, and this bill will provide all of us with that protection. Licensing interpreters is a good way to hold interpreters accountable, and to provide Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Marylanders with a way to reliably report unqualified or poorly trained interpreters. This is an important step forward for Maryland, and as a Deaf citizen and the chair of MACDHH, I fully support this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Michele Westfall
Chair, Maryland Advisory Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing
106 Garth Ter, Gaithersburg, MD 20879
240-575-2069
macdhhchair@yahoo.com

SB346.DD Council.Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 14, 2023

SB 346: Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act

Position: Support

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates changes to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. Our vision is that people with and without disabilities in Maryland live, learn, work, and play together.

SB 346 is critical to ensure Marylanders who use sign language interpreters receive qualified and regulated communication support. According to the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, over 20% of Marylanders, age 12 or older, are deaf or hard of hearing in at least one ear. Almost 13% are deaf or hard of hearing in both ears.¹ Many of these individuals use sign language for communication.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- Establishes the licensing and regulatory system for sign language interpreters in Maryland and creates a state board in the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing to create licensing requirements and then license qualified people to provide sign language interpretation services.
- Requires people to be licensed by the Board before they can provide sign language interpretation services in the state unless the person is licensed in another state or with a national registry agency with comparable qualification requirements and submits an application in Maryland.
- Establishes the Sign Language Interpreters Fund to cover the costs of the licensing and regulatory system and support the licensure of marginalized interpreters, the development of mentorship programs, and provide financial assistance to applicants.

WHY is this legislation important?

- **Communication is a fundamental right and communication access is protected under federal law.** However, the right to communication is limited for many Marylanders because of the obstacles they face due to unqualified interpreters.
- **People who use sign language to communicate face unequal treatment in many settings that can be intensified with unqualified interpreters.** For example, with children who use sign language to communicate, access to unqualified interpreters in education settings can have lifelong impacts.
- **Unqualified sign language interpreters exacerbate the already difficult consequences of miscommunication in high stakes situations.** In fact, when a Marylander uses a sign language interpreter, such as to attend a doctor appointment or in court, they carry the burden of

¹ <https://odhh.maryland.gov/press-releases/featured-story/over-1-2-million-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-marylanders/>

miscommunication. This means, when an unqualified interpreter misconstrues the conversation with a doctor or a judge, the individual experiences serious consequences. The interpreter does not.

- **Currently there is no statewide system to regulate sign language interpreters.** While the ADA requires equal access to communication, it does not specify the qualifications needed by sign language interpreters. This bill clarifies a legal threshold for what constitutes a “qualified” sign language interpreter in Maryland.
- **It supports the licensure for sign language interpreters from historically marginalized communities.** While 22 states already have licensure requirements, very few focus on diverse and inclusive group interpreters.

People with disabilities want and need equal access to communication, and have the right to functionally equivalent communication. This is particularly true for people who use sign language. Maryland should have high standards and expectations of sign language interpreters. **Communication support must be effective, accurate, impartial, and include specialized vocabulary as needed. This bill is the step needed to make this happen.** For these reasons, the Council supports SB 346.

Contact: Stephanie Dolamore, Director of Policy Initiatives: SDolamore@md-council.org

Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act

Uploaded by: Rebecca Minor

Position: FAV



SB 0346 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
Environment Energy and Education Committee

Testimony
Submitted by,

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

February 13, 2023

Dear Honorable Representatives:

I am writing in reference to SB 0346 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act of 2023, sponsored by Senator Nancy King, which will establish a licensure procedure for Maryland Sign Language Interpreters. I am the Coordinator for the Community College of Baltimore County's Sign Language Interpreter Training Program. There are 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. I support the bill as written.

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

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

Thank you,

Rebecca F. Minor, Ph.D.

Program Coordinator – ASL and Interpreter Preparation

The Community College of Baltimore County Rminor3@ccbcmd.edu

SB346 Sponsor Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Nancy King

Position: FAV

NANCY J. KING
Legislative District 39
Montgomery County

MAJORITY LEADER

Budget and Taxation Committee

Chair

Education, Business and
Administration Subcommittee



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 120
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
301-858-3686 · 410-841-3686
800-492-7122 Ext. 3686
Fax 301-858-3670 · 410-841-3670
Nancy.King@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 346 – Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act

February 14, 2023

Mister Chairman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment 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](https://www.godhh.org/2020_p18_GODHH_Interpreters.pdf) ([maryland.gov](https://www.maryland.gov)).

One of the strategies mentioned in the report is the creation of a licensing requirement for sign language interpreters. Twenty two states in the country have licensing requirements for sign language interpreters. Senate Bill 346 – Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act – will set the framework for licensing in Maryland.

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 346.

AEdwards0346 Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Annaliesa Edwards and I am a relative of a Deaf individual who is also living and studying in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.
Sincerely,

Annaliesa Edwards
annaliesa.r.edwards@gmail.com

BDelahoussaye 0346Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Blaise Delahoussaye, I am a DeafBlind individual living and working in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a DeafBlind constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Blaise Delahoussaye
wolfrog65@yahoo.com

CHatton0346Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Claire Hatton, I am a hearing interpreter working in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a working constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Claire Hatton
hattoninterpreting@gmail.com

JLeffler 0346 Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Jacob Leffler, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a Deaf constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Jacob Leffler
JLeffler24@gmail.com

MSmith Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Michelle Smith and I am a relative of a Deaf individual living and working in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.
Sincerely,

Michelle Smith
thesmiths2006@gmail.com

MWhite 0346Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Mary Ann White, I am a Deaf individual living and working in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a Deaf constituent in Maryland and on behalf of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing program in Prince Georges County Public Schools, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann White
maryannwhite54@gmail.com

ROwens Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Rita Owens, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a Deaf constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Rita Owens
nkowens@gmail.com

S_Abdilah MDIL Testimony - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

Mister Chairman and Members of the House Committee on Health and Government Operations,

My name is Shelby Abdilah. I am a Hearing Interpreter and member of both the Potomac Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and Maryland Association of the Deaf. I live in Gaithersburg and work around Maryland. I am writing this testimony to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King.

For too long, Maryland has had no mechanism for regulating people calling themselves sign language interpreters. As a result, there have been many instances of new signers, with no interpreter training, taking high stakes jobs such as medical, psychological and legal assignments and skewing the message so severely that the ramifications for the deaf individual have often been truly life or death. Even when the consequences aren't deadly, they have a major impact on the ability of deaf individuals to access employment, higher education, safety information, etc.

As a certified interpreter who is actively involved in mentoring up and coming interpreters, I see the necessity of licensure to protect working interpreters and our profession as a whole, but also to protect the next generation from unwittingly being put in circumstances above their skill level by unscrupulous businesses. Licensure, the complaint process provided for by the bill and the legal ramifications act as discouragement for these unethical practices.

I urge you to listen to the testimony from the Deaf community and see that the need for licensure of interpreters in the state of Maryland is long overdue.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Shelby Abdilah CI,CT

SCooley 0346Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Shannon Cooley, I am a Deaf individual living and working in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a Deaf constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Shannon Cooley
ms.shannoncooley@gmail.com

TJoyner Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Tina Joyner, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a Deaf constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Tina Joyner
tina@joyner8.com

VPorter 0346Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is Vikki Porter, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a Deaf constituent in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Vikki Porter
porter.vikki.l@gmail.com

WMillios 0346Senate Letter - Google Docs.pdf

Uploaded by: Shelby Abdilah

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice-Chair Kagan
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Chair Feldman and Vice Chair Kagan:

My name is William Millios, I am a Deaf individual working in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a Deaf constituent working in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346. As the CEO of a non-profit organization based in Maryland that serves Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and DeafBlind individuals, I have a vested interest in seeing this bill pass - not just for those we serve, but for those who work in the organization.

Without qualified and licensed interpreters, we and our constituents cannot achieve equal access to communications that lead to self-employment and business ownership.

Sincerely,

William Millios
william.millios@gmail.com

Summers, Stephanie.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 12, 2023

The Honorable Senator King
(Room Number), State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Senator King:

My name is Stephanie Summers, I am a Deaf individual who lives and work in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a constituent (serving as part of a whole/group), I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Summers
srsummers4@gmail.com

Aaron Goldman written testimony for Senate .pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator King
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Senator King:

My name is Aaron Goldman, I have Deaf/DeafBlind/Hard of Hearing relative(s) and live in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Aaron Goldman
goldman.edwards@gmail.com

Eden Vrieze written testimony for Senate (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator Zucker
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Senator Zucker:

My name is Eden Vrieze, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Eden Vrieze
evrieze@gmail.com

Erin Harrison written testimony for Senate .pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator Benson:
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Senator Benson:

My name is Erin Harrison, I am a Hearing Interpreter and live and work in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual in Maryland, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Erin Harrison
opeia.smiling@gmail.com

Gail Edwards written testimony for Senate .pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator King
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Senator King:

My name is Gail Edwards, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Gail Edwards
gailcbsr@aol.com

Joe Smith written testimony for Senate .pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator Simonaire:
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Senator Simonaire:

My name is Joe Smith, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Joe Smith
smithlee11@gmail.com

Nikkia Morton written testimony for Senate .pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator Zucker
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Senator Zucker:

My name is Nikkia Morton, I am a Hearing Interpreter and live, study and work in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Nikkia Morton
nikkia.morton@gmail.com

Ricky Edwards written testimony for Senate .pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator King
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Honorable Senator King:

My name is Ricky Edwards, I am a Deaf individual living in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Ricky Edwards
rickyechef@aol.com

Summers, Mark written testimony for Senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator King
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Senator King:

My name is Mark Summers, I am a Deaf individual who lives and works in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As an interested individual, I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Mark Summers
thinker623@gmail.com

Summers, Stephanie written testimony for Senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV

February 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator King
State Capitol
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB346 sponsored by Senators King, Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West

Dear Senator King:

My name is Stephanie Summers, I am a Deaf individual who lives and work in Maryland.

I am writing to ask you to support SB346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act of 2023 sponsored by Senator King Bailey, Brooks, Elfreth, Jackson, Klausmeier, Salling, and West. This bill would require licensure for sign language interpreters working in the state of Maryland and help to ensure that members of the Deaf community have access to qualified interpreters. When unqualified interpreters are allowed to work unchecked, the impact on the communities they serve can be a matter of life or death. This bill provides both a mechanism for licensing interpreters and a means for relief in the form of a grievance process. I urge you to support this important piece of legislation.

As a constituent (serving as part of a whole/group), I ask you to please support SB346.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Summers
srsummers4@gmail.com

Testimony In Support of SB 346 - HB 260 - EEE - AS

Uploaded by: Stephanie Summers

Position: FAV



February 22, 2023

Maryland House Senate
11 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD. 21401

In Support of SB 346 / HB 260: Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act

Members of the Maryland Senate's Education, Energy & Environment Committee.

We are an organization of military and non-military families with over 1500 plus members fully support SB 346 / HB 260.

We support any bill that improves access to qualified ASL services, licensing ASL interpreters, while helping to improve inclusion and equity in all major life settings for persons living with disabilities. Including improvements to access while interacting within medical, legal and local / state government entities and operations.

For these citizens, ASL interpreters are as basic as eyeglasses for sight, or ramps & elevators for those who may struggle with walking up or down stairs. This bill is about improving quality of services, community engagement and ensuring that more citizens are included in so many of life's major activities. Including full and meaningful participation in medical, legal and government operations.

We thank the Delegate for bringing forward such a positive and transformative piece of legislation. It truly will have a positive impact on all of Maryland's citizens, and help give them agency in all governmental matters and in other aspects of their lives.

We ask that the committee please return a favorable report, and support SB 346 / HB 260.

Thank you all for your time and consideration of our testimony.

Respectfully,

Mr. Richard Ceruolo | richceruolo@gmail.com
Parent, Lead Advocate and Director of Public Policy
Parent Advocacy Consortium (Find us on Facebook/Meta)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ParentAdvocacyConsortium>

Congdon_finalMDIL_testimony_2023.pdf

Uploaded by: Tara Congdon

Position: FAV

Tara Congdon
720-235-0688
tschupner@gmail.com

February 14, 2023

Chair and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Thank you for having me here today. I am speaking in support of SB346, the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act. I urge you to pass this bill because it is crucial to protecting the safety and well-being of not only Deaf Marylanders, but also their loved ones.

This is my fourth time testifying in support of interpreter licensure. My previous testimonies are more comprehensive, and I've resubmitted them as appendixes to my testimony today. I encourage you to read them. Today, I want to focus on a specific experience in which an unqualified interpreter put my daughter at risk.

When my daughter was a baby, her pediatrician referred us to a cranial helmet practice for evaluation because of some abnormalities in her skull. When I arrived at the appointment, I immediately recognized the interpreter as one well-known in the community for being dangerously unqualified to interpret in medical settings, yet frequently accepting such assignments. I'd had him before, myself, for an emergency room visit and an annual checkup. I dismissed him both times and used pen and paper instead.

Yet, here we were again. Yet again, I had to choose between using him and having no sign language interpreter. This time, I had little choice. My hands were full with my 5-month-old, and I could not use pen and paper. And because of masking, I could not lipread. I knew that entire appointment, even without being able to lipread the doctor, that I could not trust I was getting all the spoken information accurately. What was interpreted to me was that my daughter was being referred back to her pediatrician because the center could not treat her.

The next day, I called our pediatrician and asked them to email me the report from the helmet place as soon as they got it. A week later, when I opened the file, I was shocked. My daughter likely had craniosynostosis – one of the sutures in her skull had fused prematurely and was restricting her brain's growth. She needed to be referred to a neurosurgeon. None of that information was conveyed during the appointment. Not once was the word "neurosurgeon" ever interpreted. But the report stated that the doctor had explained all this to me during the appointment.

I immediately dove into research. I learned that there were two options: a minimally invasive endoscopic procedure to open up the suture, or an invasive cranial vault reconstruction. One would take 45 minutes, keep my daughter in the hospital overnight, and leave her with a one-inch scar, but require helmeting for a year. The other would require waiting for months to a year, the pressure in my daughter's head rising as the skull failed to expand with her growing brain, potentially causing irreparable brain damage including lifelong learning disabilities and emotional disorders. It would require about 6 hours in the OR, peel back all the skin from her

skull, involve blood transfusions and several nights in the hospital, further increase the risk of brain damage and death, and leave my daughter with a zig-zag scar from ear to ear.

I also learned that most doctors will not do endo after 4 months old. Out of desperation, I called the surgeon who himself invented the procedure. He consulted with us and said he could operate on my daughter as long as it was before she turned 6 months. Fortuitously, he had an opening in his schedule in two weeks – when my daughter would be 5 months, 3 weeks old. Just one catch ... he's in El Paso, Texas.

We scrambled. In the middle of a COVID surge hitting El Paso hard, we paid thousands of dollars to fly there and rent a car and airBNB for 10 days, and took that time off work. Since then, we've flown out two more times for follow-ups, spending thousands of dollars each time. Today, my daughter is a beautiful, smart 2 ½ year old. You couldn't find the scar, if you tried to look. She has no lingering damage – she can speak or sign over 300 words and loves to climb, run, and play. She knows no limits.

But what if I didn't know to not trust that particular interpreter's translation? What if I was less attuned to potential omissions or mistranslations? What if I decided to refuse that interpreter and reschedule the appointment to weeks later, in hopes of getting a different interpreter? What if I waited a few more days to follow up? What if I was less pushy? What if I was not as well educated or capable of doing my research and understanding the implications? What if we didn't have the resources to take an emergency trip to El Paso in the middle of a pandemic?

We would have missed that tiny window remaining to us to provide our daughter what we felt was the best possible medical treatment, for her health and future.

There was – and is – nothing we can do to protect ourselves and other families from that interpreter and numerous others like him. There is no way to file a complaint against these interpreters, and there is no system in place to ensure they do not accept assignments they are not qualified for. There is no protection for families like mine from being forced, the moment we arrive at an appointment, to choose between a dangerously unqualified interpreter and having no interpreter at all, or postponing necessary medical treatment.

It is my responsibility as a mother to protect my daughter, but I have very little power to ensure that particular interpreter – or any unqualified interpreter – does not show up to interpret another appointment for me or my daughter. I have no way to protect us from those interpreters hamstringing my ability to make life-altering medical decisions for myself or my children.

Only you have that power and ability. Please protect us and our children from those interpreters by passing this bill.

Thank you,

Tara Congdon

Appendix I: 2022 Testimony to House

Tara Congdon
909 Roswell Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20901
720.235.0688
tschupner@gmail.com

March 4, 2022

Chair and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

I am a Deaf Maryland resident and taxpayer who is fluent in American Sign Language. I use interpreters to access educational and employment opportunities and health care and other essential services for myself and my family. I am writing in support of HB1107: The Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act.

It is imperative that you establish interpreter licensure for the safety and well-being of all Deaf people who depend on ASL interpreters to access health care, legal proceedings, employment, and other facets of life in Maryland. I am not being hyperbolic when I say our lives, liberty, and pursuit of happiness depend on this. Maryland has no mechanism to require that interpreters demonstrate their qualifications and ability to interpret, or to hold accountable individuals who pass themselves off as qualified but are not. As a result, abuse is rampant throughout the state and too many Deaf Marylanders have experienced horrifying, life-threatening situations. I describe only a sampling of those I have personally experienced in an appendix to this letter.

This bill is essential not only for Deaf people, but for all people who interact with, serve, or depend on these Deaf people. These people include children and relatives who depend on their Deaf parents or guardians to put food on the table and make decisions about health care and legal proceedings. When Deaf parents like myself are provided unqualified interpreters, we do not get the complete and accurate information we need to make decisions for our children, which can have serious consequences. These people also include doctors, nurses, lawyers, and other professionals who provide services to Deaf people. Doctors rely on interpreters to collect and provide the necessary information to treat their Deaf patients to the same level and quality that they do their hearing patients. Without qualified interpreters, doctors do not get the information they need to appropriately treat their Deaf patients, putting these patients at serious risk of injury or death and the doctors and hospitals at risk of medical malpractice lawsuits.

Five years ago, my husband and I embarked on our fertility journey and then our journey as parents. The journey was long, expensive, and heart-wrenching. It involved significant out-of-pocket expenses, time and energy, and painful losses. The last thing we needed was for unqualified and unethical sign language interpreters to make our journey even more difficult and painful. We began this journey with trust in our medical care providers and interpreters. That trust was repeatedly violated and we were repeatedly harmed and traumatized, nearly lost our opportunity to be parents, and then nearly missed the window of opportunity to get a lifesaving operation for our daughter. I am convinced that the only way to keep Deaf Marylanders like

myself and our children safe from incompetent and unethical interpreters is for you, on behalf of the state of Maryland, to step in.

Interpreter licensure will not solve all problems, but it will take significant steps toward 1) preventing unqualified interpreters from taking assignments beyond their abilities; and 2) providing a mechanism to hold these individuals accountable when they do. Currently, no such mechanism exists beyond filing civil rights complaints, which is daunting for Deaf people who, for example, depend on keeping the same doctors for their health care, especially for chronic conditions and ongoing treatment. For example, once we paid \$30,000 out of pocket for IVF treatment and drugs, went through egg retrieval, and had viable embryos, we were stuck with our clinic and its contract with an agency that repeatedly sent unqualified interpreters. We had to choose between accepting the frustrations, stress, and dangers caused by these “interpreters” versus sacrificing our sunk costs and worse, our embryos. We persevered and have a beautiful daughter, but I have post-traumatic stress disorder from repeated abuse at the hands of these individuals. I did not sue our clinic after the fact because suing doctors does nothing to stop the individual interpreters or their employer agencies from continuing to send them out to interpret.

You will hear objections from certain parties who benefit financially from the status quo. These parties own small interpreting agencies and rely on the lack of regulation to exploit the system by subcontracting unqualified, uncertified interpreters in order to underbid other agencies that could provide qualified interpreters. They make their profit by exploiting hospitals’ and doctors’ ignorance and taking advantage of a business model that ignores the voices (and hands) of Deaf patients.

I urge you to prioritize the thousands of Deaf Marylanders and their families over the handful of such parties and move this bill forward because lives are at stake. We have suffered enough at the hands of these unscrupulous business owners and unqualified interpreters. It is well past time for the Maryland legislature to do something about this. I told you my story last year. How many more times do I need to come before you to plead this case?

You have the opportunity before you to dramatically improve conditions for Deaf people like myself and the people who interact with, depend on, or support us throughout our state. Please do not pass up this opportunity.

Thank you,

Tara Congdon

Appendix II: 2021 Testimony to Senate (2/9/21) and House (2/24/21)

Tara Congdon
909 Roswell Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20901
720.235.0688
tschupner@gmail.com

February 9, 2021

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

I am a Deaf Maryland resident who is fluent in American Sign Language and rely on interpreters for access. I am writing in support of SB0431: The Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act.

It is vitally important that you establish interpreter licensure, for the safety and well-being of all Marylanders who depend on sign language interpreters to access health care, legal proceedings, employment, and many other facets of life in this state. Our lives, liberty, and pursuit of happiness—including pursuit of education and employment—depends on these interpreters being trained, skilled, qualified, and ethical. However, no mechanism exists to require that interpreters demonstrate their qualifications and ability to interpret, or to hold accountable individuals who pass themselves off as qualified but are not. As a result, abuse runs rampant throughout the state and far too many Deaf Marylanders have experienced horrifying, life-threatening situations created by these individuals. I describe only a sampling of many I have personally experienced in an appendix to this letter.

This bill is crucial not only for Deaf Marylanders, but for all hearing Marylanders who interact with or depend on Deaf people. These include children and relatives who depend on their Deaf parents or caretakers to make decisions about their health care and legal proceedings. When Deaf caretakers are provided incompetent, unqualified interpreters, they do not get the complete and accurate information they need to make these decisions, which can have serious consequences. This bill is also critical for the doctors, nurses, lawyers, and other professionals who provide services to Deaf patients and clients. Doctors, for example, rely on interpreters to collect and provide the necessary information to treat their Deaf patients to the same level and quality that they do their hearing patients. When these interpreters are not trained, skilled, qualified, or ethical, doctors do not get the accurate and complete information they need to appropriately and competently treat their Deaf patients, putting these patients at serious risk of injury or death.

Four years ago, my husband and I embarked on our fertility journey and then our journey as parents. This journey in itself has been long, difficult, expensive, and heart-wrenching. It has involved out-of-pocket costs exceeding \$35,000, failed cycles, and painful losses. The last thing we expected, and wanted, was for unqualified and unethical sign language interpreters to complicate it and make our journey even more difficult, expensive, and emotionally painful than it needed to be. We began this journey with trust in our medical care providers and interpreters. That trust was repeatedly violated and we were repeatedly harmed and traumatized. I am

convinced now that the only way to keep Deaf Marylanders like myself safe from incompetent and unethical interpreters is for the state of Maryland to step in and regulate them.

The appendix to this letter details some of our experiences to help you better understand the critical need for this bill. I hope you will take the time to read the appendix in its entirety. If you do not, please at least read the incidents that took place in June 2018 and on April 18, 2019. They encapsulate the dangers unqualified interpreters pose to Deaf patients' physical, emotional, and financial well-being.

To be sure, interpreter licensure will not solve all problems, but it will take significant steps toward 1) preventing uncertified, unqualified, unethical, and/or inexperienced individuals from taking interpreting assignments; and 2) providing a mechanism to hold these individuals accountable when they do. Currently, no such mechanism exists beyond filing civil rights complaints against doctor's offices, which is daunting for Deaf people when they depend on these doctors for health care, especially for chronic conditions and expensive, ongoing treatment. For example, once we signed our commitment with our fertility clinic, paid \$30,000 out of pocket for IVF treatment and drugs, went through egg retrieval, and had viable embryos, we were trapped because of the clinic's contract with an interpreting agency that repeatedly sent unqualified interpreters. We had to choose between accepting the frustrations, stress, and dangers caused by these "interpreters" and sacrificing our sunk costs—financial, time, and emotion—and worse, our embryos. We persevered and now have a beautiful daughter, but I continue to experience post-traumatic stress disorder from repeated abuse at the hands of these individuals.

You will hear objections from various parties to various aspects of this bill. Some of them, I agree with. Some, I don't. But I urge you to move this bill forward—with amendments if necessary to address concerns—because lives are at stake and Deaf Marylanders have suffered enough. Far too many individual interpreters, the agencies they work with, and the doctor's offices who contract these agencies are not putting Deaf patients' well-being first and ensuring appropriate communication access through qualified interpreters. This is why we desperately need mechanisms to screen interpreters and hold each of them accountable.

It is well past time for the Maryland legislature to do something about this. You have the opportunity before you to dramatically improve conditions for Deaf Marylanders and people who interact with, depend on, or support us throughout our state. Please do not pass up this opportunity.

Thank you,

Tara Congdon

Appendix III: Selected Incidents of Unqualified Medical Interpreting

- **June 2018** – I went to my OB-GYN for an uterine endoscopy to try to identify the cause of our infertility. An uncertified interpreter I had encountered before and requested *not* return showed up to interpret the procedure. She omitted vital information while translating the pre-procedure discussion between myself and my doctor, during which my doctor explained options if I was unable to withstand the pain from the endoscopy. During the endoscopy, I expressed that I was experiencing pain but could continue. Instead of voicing this, the interpreter laid her hands on me and attempted to comfort me, informing me that she had experienced it before – a violation of interpreting ethics and an overstepping of boundaries. This distracted me so much that I asked the doctor to pause a moment; the interpreter voiced to the doctor that I was requesting to terminate the procedure. The doctor stopped, withdrew the scope, and informed me that the only alternative was an outpatient laparoscopic procedure under full anesthesia, which would cost me \$2,000 and require 2 days off work to heal. I was stunned and told her I wished I had known that before we started, and she told me she had communicated that. But the interpreter did not translate it. I had to proceed with the more invasive laparoscopy, endure even more physical pain, and absorb the financial blow and loss of work time.
- **August 2018** – An uncertified interpreter showed up for a doctor’s appointment in which critical information about fertility and treatment options, including surgery, would be discussed. This interpreter mistranslated 50 percent of the spoken content and could not accurately voice 90 percent of signed content. The doctor and I eventually gave up, asked the interpreter to stand in a corner, and resorted to pen and paper to communicate with each other. When I called the interpreting agency afterward to object about the interpreter they sent and that we were unable to obtain all the information we needed to make critical decisions about options for fertility treatment, they sent me Edible Arrangements chocolate-covered apple slices as an apology.
- **October 2018** – A recent graduate from an Interpreter Training Program outside Maryland and who had just moved to the area showed up to interpret an appointment with our fertility doctor, during which we were to receive very specific instructions for medication to take to prepare for our first attempt to become pregnant. The interpreter could not read my fingerspelling or signing, and she did not know the signs for very basic anatomical and medical terminology. I gave her a crash course about these signs in the waiting room. In the exam room, she voiced the complete opposite of everything I signed. When I asked the doctor to confirm that I should take a particular injection before another, and then take an oral medication at a particular time, she voiced that I was asking if I should take the second injection before the former, and *not* take the oral medication. Confusion ensued between the doctor and myself. I had to begin signing extremely slowly, to the point the doctor could understand me before the interpreter did. And the doctor had to come face-to-face to me and speak very slowly and clearly so I could lipread her and ensure I understood every step of the course of medication and exactly when to take each injection or pill so that our \$4,000 investment in this procedure would not be wasted due to a timing or sequence error resulting from mistranslation.

- **December 2018** – A very young, very inexperienced, first-year Interpreter Training Program student showed up to interpret an OB-GYN appointment which included an annual checkup, pap, and discussion about our fertility treatment. This student confessed that she had never interpreted an OB appointment and did not know basic interpreting etiquette, including where to stand or how to facilitate a translated conversation between doctor and patient. She also kept making comments like “this is so fascinating” and asking me questions about how and why things work or are done the way they are to women’s bodies and regarding pregnancy. Despite feeling extremely awkward—because it is not my job to do so—I strongly advised her to not take any more medical interpreting assignments until she had at least completed her training program, and more ideally, achieved certification.
- **April 2019** – At a cardiology appointment, while describing my historical and current symptoms (some of which were side effects of fertility medication to prepare for our first embryo transfer), and my family history, an uncertified, inexperienced interpreter struggled to voice what I was signing. Every time I started signing, she panicked and lost her voice. The doctor was perplexed and could not understand what was happening. I took pen and paper and wrote to the doctor that this interpreter was not accurately translating *anything* I was saying. Finally, I instructed the interpreter that I was going to switch to Signed English, in which I signed every single word, in English word order, and that she was to voice, word for word, every word I signed *as* I signed it, very slowly. I had to support her through the entire appointment, which took longer than necessary and during which I was not able to communicate to my cardiologist the full extent of my symptoms or get a satisfactory understanding of treatment options.
- **April 18, 2019** – Embryo transfer day. Also known as the first time in my life I kicked an interpreter out – not just out of the exam room, but off the assignment completely. She was an unqualified, unskilled, uncertified, recent ITP graduate who had just moved to Maryland. Her signing was unclear and I could not understand her translation of a nurse’s instructions, three times. When she missed or misheard something, she did not ask the doctor or nurses for clarification or to repeat; instead, she skipped over the information. When I asked my husband to help me understand, the interpreter interfered and said to me, “You don’t need to look at him, I’m interpreting this for you, you don’t need to ask him for help.” She continuously mistranslated what I was signing, to the point my husband had to step in and correct her several times. She spoke to me like I was an unintelligent, uneducated child, and made comments about how she had never interpreted an embryo transfer before and that this was “going to be *so* fascinating!” She also spoke rudely to my doctor and, when my doctor attempted to give me consent forms to sign before he proceeded with the embryo transfer, the interpreter interrupted and instructed him to read the forms aloud so she could translate them into ASL for me. This confused the doctor because he knew me well and knew I preferred to read the forms for myself before signing them. At that point, I had had enough. I asked her politely to please leave the room so we could proceed with the embryo transfer without her disruptive presence. She refused and argued with me that she could do the job. I became extremely upset and was in tears because an already stressful—but exciting—day was now a nightmare. My doctor was extremely concerned, and my husband and I tried to explain to him that this

interpreter was very problematic. She interrupted, undermined us, and told the doctor that I was just upset because she didn't accurately translate my birth date. My husband and I both snapped at her blatant disrespect of us and our request, and with me sobbing, my husband yelled at her to leave the room, and we asked a nurse to make sure security escorted the interpreter from the building, to avoid any unpleasant scenes after the appointment. After the interpreter left, my doctor was staring at me in shock—he had always known me as a very calm, rational, unflappable person—and I had to explain, with my husband voicing for me, what had just happened. My doctor was so concerned about my emotional state that he was uncertain whether we should proceed with the embryo transfer because he was worried that all the negative hormones now in my system would affect the success of the transfer. But we had no choice because the embryo had been thawed. If we did not proceed, the embryo would have to be discarded. We proceeded, I became pregnant, and 12 weeks later, the baby died.

- **April 2019-November 2020** – a gap in incidents because I became far more assertive about demanding that doctor's offices allow me to select my interpreters for the rest of my fertility treatments, pregnancy, delivery, and pediatric appointments for our infant daughter. I spent many hours on the phone and email battling with individual doctor's office staff and corporate general counsel, explaining the legal risks to them of continuing to use uncertified, unqualified interpreters for their Deaf patients and that these risks outweighed any contractual commitment to interpreting agencies that repeatedly send such individuals to interpret high-stakes medical appointments. This became an immensely stressful part-time job even as I struggled with working full-time while experiencing pregnancy symptoms amidst the uncertainty of what delivering during COVID-19 would involve, and caring for our newborn daughter.
- **November 2020** – Our daughter was referred to a helmet place due to asymmetry of her skull. The practice refused to allow me to select the interpreter. An uncertified, unqualified interpreter showed up to interpret, and he provided extremely inaccurate and incomplete translations in both directions. When he misheard or missed spoken information from the doctor, he waved his hands or skipped over it but in a way that was so smooth that I did not realize he was omitting significant chunks of information. When the doctor informed me that his practice could not treat my daughter and that he was sending us back to our pediatrician for further consultation, I did not understand why but due to the interpreter decided to wait and speak with our pediatrician. The next day, I spoke with our pediatrician over the phone and he told us that the doctor recommended our daughter see a neurosurgeon due to the type of skull asymmetry she had. I was shocked because at no point during the appointment did the interpreter ever sign the word neurosurgeon or that surgery on my daughter's skull would be necessary to prevent intracranial pressure that could damage her brain and eyes. The following week, I received paperwork from the doctor's office and it included all the details about the recommendation for neurosurgery referral and that the doctor had discussed this information with me during the appointment.

MDIL Written Testimony - SB 0346.pdf

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Position: FAV

Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony
SB 346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
Tuesday, February 14, 2023

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 7 other sponsors, and Delegate Heather Bagnall and 12 other sponsors who have been incredible and invaluable sponsors of this landmark legislative bill.

During his campaign, Governor Moore pledged that "no one is left behind." However, there is one thing the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and the DeafBlind communities would like to see left behind: the scrounge of fraudulent and unqualified sign language interpreters. There are laws, regulations, and licensure requirements 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 on the communities they profess to serve, the costs are significant: physical, emotional, mental, and financial. As an example, one Deaf upper middle class married couple with two children under the ages of 5 years old 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.

Thank you in advance for your support.

MDAD Board of Directors

sb346.pdf

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Position: UNF

MARYLAND JUDICIAL CONFERENCE
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Hon. Matthew J. Fader
Chief Justice

187 Harry S. Truman Parkway
Annapolis, MD 21401

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 346
Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
DATE: February 1, 2023
(2/14)
POSITION: Oppose

The Judiciary opposes Senate Bill 346. 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 2022, the Program provided in-person interpreters for 17,261 events. In Fiscal Year 2022, 8% (1447), of those assignments were for American Sign Language (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).

1. 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.

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

a. ***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 an understand the policies in the Handbook, including the Maryland Code of Conduct for Court Interpreters.

b. ***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.

c. ***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.

d. ***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.

3. 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, our vendor would be required to provide only interpreters approved by the Maryland Board.

The Judiciary 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. The Judiciary is actively promoting the use of video remote interpreting to ensure courts are able to secure interpreter resources quickly and effectively, and to reduce the costs of travel time and mileage in order to make the best use of state financial resources.

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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. The bill would infringe upon 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.

9. 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.

10. The provision authorizing joint and several liability does not make sense. On page 23, lines 26-29, the bill states that an individual found to have violated the statute is jointly and severally liable. However, on page 23, lines 13-17, the bill only authorizes a person to seek an injunction. As such, there would not be an award for damages. Rather, any order entered would prohibit the violator from providing such services. Moreover, even if the bill authorized a legal action for damages, rather than simply an equitable action for an injunction, it is unclear who would be jointly liable.

For these reasons, the Judiciary OPPOSES the bill.

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