

COMMITTEE: House Health and Government Operations

DATE: February 21, 2023

BILL NO: House Bill 260

BILL TITLE: Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act

In Support of House Bill 260 – Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act

To the Honorable Members of the Maryland State House of Delegates Health and Government Operations Committee,

I write to express my strong support for HB 260, the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act.

As a practicing and qualified Spanish-language court interpreter based here in Maryland, I have provided training on behalf of the Maryland Administrative Office's Court Interpreting Program in the past and currently provide interpreting services directly to the state's courts. I know the courts value providing quality services to their stakeholders. Having provided my services to the Maryland courts since 2017, I can speak to the challenges that untrained interpreters present in legal settings. In Maryland courts, I have encountered situations where another interpreter was unqualified and untrained, resulting in miscommunications and misunderstandings. This remains a problem in Maryland courts, and many interpreters like me are hesitant to accept assignments as a result. This issue plagues spoken and sign language interpreting service provision. For my sign language interpreter colleagues, the establishment of a licensing and regulatory system for sign language interpreters in Maryland will certainly improve the quality of court interpreters, as well as sign language interpreters in other settings throughout the state.

The creation of such a system for sign language interpreters is a vital step in ensuring that Marylanders who are Deaf or hard of hearing have access to professionally trained and certified interpreters. By requiring sign language interpreters to meet certain qualifications and adhere to standards of professional conduct, this act will help to safeguard the integrity of the interpreting profession and protect the rights of those who rely on these services.

Without a licensing and regulatory system, there is no assurance that individuals providing interpreting services have the necessary qualifications and training to do so effectively. This can lead to miscommunications, misunderstandings, and even potential harm to individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Certified sign language interpreters, particularly those in Maryland and the Deaf community, strongly support the implementation of a licensure bill for sign language interpreters. This legislation would only affect untrained and uncertified interpreters and unscrupulous providers, and bringing more professionalism and accountability to sign language interpreting services in the state.

The [Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#) has subject matter expertise in the needs of Marylanders who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and is well-equipped to increase the number of new sign language interpreters seeking to be qualified as legal interpreters, as well as to support the return of seasoned and experienced legal sign language interpreters who are eager to provide services in Maryland courts.

As a resident of Maryland and professional interpreter, I urge you to support this important legislation. By establishing a licensing and regulatory system for sign language interpreters, Maryland can help to ensure that all its citizens, regardless of their hearing status, have equal access to vital services and information.

Thank you for your consideration of this essential legislation.

Sincerely,

Garrett M. Bradford

Interpreter, Translator, and Trainer
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