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Health and Government Operations  
Committee  
Subcommittees

Health Occupations and Long-Term Care

Public Health and  
Minority Health Disparities

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22, 2023

**HB260 Sign Language Interpreters Act**

Madame Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about House Bill 260.

In 2016, Johns Hopkins conducted a research survey which determined 1.2 million people in Maryland are either deaf or hard of hearing in at least one ear.<sup>1</sup> Despite the sheer number of people in the State who experience hearing loss, reliable deaf services remain difficult to access for many Marylanders. One of the most egregious barriers to reliable service and support for our Deaf communities is a lack of oversight and regulation for sign language interpreters. Deaf communities across the State report interpreters being utilized in jobs for which they are unqualified to interpret on a regular basis; as you will hear in other testimony, this has the potential to cause severe harm to Deaf people in Maryland. For this reason, it is necessary to implement a regulatory framework by which individuals who provide sign language interpretation services can become licensed and regulated, ensuring that unqualified or fraudulent interpretation services do not impact the day-to-day lives of the residents of Maryland. House Bill 260 provides a solution to that end.

House Bill 260 stipulates that members of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters will create standards for and license qualified individuals providing sign language interpretation services, promote the work of sign language interpreters, and grow the profession. Licensure and regulation are necessary to prevent instances of fraudulent interpretation, a threat to deaf Marylander's livelihoods. With this change, Marylanders will no longer need to worry about whether the services they are being provided are accurate and free of misinterpretation, affording Deaf communities greater access to those services, and giving them much-needed peace of mind.

Sign language interpretation is a highly specialized skill that requires both extensive skill and knowledge. Accurate and specialized interpretation is necessary for any field to ensure that Deaf communities are receiving accurate information. House Bill 260 will make certain that those serving our constituents through interpretation are doing so accurately. I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 260.

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