

Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Training Programs

HB 260 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act Health & Government Operations

Testimony
Submitted by,
Dr. Leslie Puzio

February 20, 2023

Dear Honorable Representatives:

I am writing in reference to HB 0260 Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act of 2023, sponsored by Delegate Heather Bagnall, which will establish a licensure procedure for Maryland Sign Language Interpreters. I am a subject matter expert in the field of ASL/English interpreting for over 18 years. I have served as a professional interpreter, worked in interpreting agencies in various roles, created one of only two ASL Interpreter programs in the state of Maryland, currently serve as the Program Manager and Assistant Professor at FCC in their ASL Interpreting program, served on the local RID board, and currently serve on the Maryland Interpreter Licensure committee. 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. The programs provide students with an AAS in ASL Interpreting with the foundational skills necessary for a student to start their Interpreting profession. However, for our graduates to obtain national certification they also need to complete a baccalaureate degree or equivalent (120 college credits).

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

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

This bill is an attempt to set up a robust licensing procedure, which will protect all Deaf individuals (children and adults) in the state of Maryland. We support the bill as written.

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

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

Thank you,

Leslie Puzio *Ed.D., M.P.A, NIC*
(she/her/hers)

Rebecca Minor *PhD, NIC*
Associate Professor & Program Coordinator

Assistant Professor & Program Manager
Frederick Community College
ASL Interpreter Preparatory Program
ASL Freelance Interpreter
lpuzio@frederick.edu

Community College of Baltimore County
Interpreter Preparation Program
ASL Freelance Interpreter
Rminor3@ccbcmd.edu