

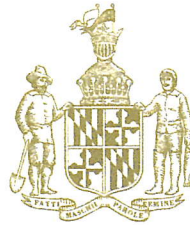
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Budget and Taxation Committee

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Education, Business, and
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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Senate Bill 502 – Language Acquisition Tracking Program
for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children - Establishment**

February 26, 2026

Mister Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

Research shows that language deprivation occurring during the first five years of life is a leading cause of reading, academic, and social struggles for many deaf children. Language acquisition for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children legislation has been passed by several states to ensure that these students are reaching the same language acquisition milestones as their hearing peers.

Senate Bill 502 will do several things:

1. It will establish a Language Acquisition Tracking Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children within the State Department of Education (MSDE).
2. It will establish a State Coordinator position for the Program within MSDE.
3. It will establish an Advisory Council to work with the State Coordinator.
4. It will require the State Coordinator in consultation with the Advisory Council to create parent and guardian resources to help in their decision making and tracking of language acquisition.
5. And it will require the State Coordinator in consultation with the Advisory Council to develop an assessment tool that will allow educators and specialist to track a child's language acquisition, progress towards kindergarten readiness and English literacy.

Parents and guardians of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children need clear, evidence-based information about their child's language learning in order to make informed decisions. And Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children deserve the chance to meet the same language milestone goals as their peers. A child who participates in the Language Acquisition Tracking Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children, will be assessed for language acquisition skills from entry into the program until age 9 – the most critical years for language learning.

I am offering two amendments. One will require assessments every six months from age 0-5 and then annually through age nine. The second adds two more representatives to the Advisory Council - A speech-language pathologist who has experience working with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and use spoken language, and a speech-language pathologist who has experience working with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and use American Sign Language.

Senate Bill 502 will enable Deaf and Hard of Hearing children more opportunities to gain a strong language foundation, and I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 502 with amendments.