



SB0502 - LANGUAGE ACQUISITION TRACKING PROGRAM FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN - ESTABLISHMENT

February 26, 2026

EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

OPPOSE

Grace Wilson, Director of Legislation & Policy (410.440.1758)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) opposes **SB0502 - Language Acquisition Tracking Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children - Establishment**. This bill establishes a language acquisition tracking program for deaf and hard of hearing children within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for the purpose of ensuring that eligible children develop language skills at the same rate and to the same extent as their peers. The program is required to be made available to eligible children at no cost.

Eligible children are required to be assessed for language acquisition skills from entry into the program until the child's ninth birthday. The program is required to track each eligible child's language acquisition using the language assessment tool approved by the Advisory Council established by the bill. The assessment with the language assessment tool is required to be administered biannually and evaluate an eligible child's progress toward meeting age- and grade-appropriate developmental milestones and language acquisition benchmarks identified by the State Coordinator established by the bill. Parents/guardians are required to choose whether the language assessment tool assesses the eligible child's signed language acquisition, spoken language acquisition, or both. If an eligible child does not demonstrate progress in expressive language acquisition and receptive language acquisition as measured by the language assessment tool, the eligible child's individualized education program (IEP), individualized family service plan, or Section 504 plan must be updated to specify specific strategies, services, and programs that will be provided to assist the child. Finally, MSDE is required to submit a report comparing the language acquisition of eligible children with the language acquisition of their peers.

This bill imposes significant administrative burdens and unfunded mandates on MSDE and local school systems by requiring the development and use of a language acquisition tracking program for deaf and hard of hearing children in the State without providing sufficient funding to support the development or use of such a language acquisition tracking program.

Moreover, such a tracking program is duplicative of the work already being done by local school systems to promote appropriate language acquisition by deaf or hard of hearing students enrolled in public schools. Local school systems currently track language acquisition in a variety of ways, including: (1) curriculum and assessments for all students; (2) the use of a multi-tiered system of supports; (3) collaborative decision making between educators, parents/guardians, and students; and (4) specialized services via the IEP or Section 504 process. This bill imposes a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach across the State without considering the tools and supports already available to deaf and hard of hearing students and their families.

In order to meet the requirements of the bill as written, AACPS would need funding to support the biannual administration of this assessment by teachers or assessment administrators, training on the administration of this assessment, and intervention and support resources should a student fail to meet established grade- or age-level standards.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests an **UNFAVORABLE** committee report on SB0502.