February 23rd, 2026

Energy, Education, and the Environment Committee
Maryland Senate
Maryland General Assembly
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
RE: SB 645 – OPPOSE

Dear Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

My name is Donna Ballmer, and I am a member of the Deaf community. I am writing regarding the proposed bill **SB0645 – State Board of Sign Language Interpreters: Membership and Licensing**. I strongly oppose this bill as currently written.

This legislation raises serious concerns for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities, who are directly impacted by the decisions of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters.

Specifically:

- This bill dilutes Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing representation on the Licensure Board. The individuals most directly impacted by the Board's decisions must retain meaningful representation and authority in matters affecting our access, safety, and civil rights.
- The bill increases representation from groups that have historically caused significant harm to the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities. This contradicts the original purpose of the Licensure Board, which was created to protect consumers and prevent further harm.
- Increased restrictions on the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, particularly through expanded collaboration with stakeholders such as State Agencies, may weaken consumer protections and undermine the rights of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals, potentially leading to further harm.

The original licensure law and current regulations are the result of more than 15 years of collaboration among Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community members and key stakeholders. These policies were carefully crafted to ensure consumer protection and uphold professional standards. Making sweeping changes at this stage undermines that work and continues a longstanding pattern of marginalization.

I respectfully urge you to oppose this bill.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of this important matter.

Donna Ballmer

Deaf Community Member

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