



**Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony**

**SB 645 - State Board Sign Language Interpreters - Membership and Licensing
Thursday, February 26, 2026
Position: Favorable with Amendments**

The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is a statewide organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the interests of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders in matters of accessibility, equity, and civil rights. Currently, approximately 1.2 million individuals in Maryland identify within these communities.

MDAD writes to express its support for SB 645, sponsored by Senator King, regarding the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters — Membership and Licensing, along with the amendments offered by Senator King and the amendment proposed below.

Establishing a licensure requirement is critically important to protect consumers and to elevate the interpreting profession through clear, enforceable, and meaningful standards.

However, MDAD has concerns regarding the inclusion of implementing agencies as voting members of the Board. Granting decision-making authority to agencies that do not possess direct experience or specialized knowledge of interpreters' professional practice may undermine the purpose and integrity of licensure. Interpreters and members of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community experience firsthand the impact of interpreting services and are uniquely positioned to inform standards, ethics, and professional accountability.

With respect to affiliated and/or implementing agencies (excluding ex officio members), we recommend that appointed representatives be certified or licensed interpreters, or individuals with demonstrated professional experience working with interpreters or Deaf individuals. Additionally, such representatives should demonstrate proficiency in American Sign Language to ensure informed and culturally competent decision-making.

The additional amendments that we want:

(VI) TWO SHALL BE AFFILIATED WITH AN ENTITY THAT OPERATES AND IMPLEMENT ~~DEAF~~ SERVICES IN AN EDUCATIONAL, LEGAL, OR MEDICAL SETTING WHO ARE INTERPRETERS OR HAVE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH INTERPETERS OR A DEAF PERSON;

(2) EXCEPT FOR THE EX OFFICIO MEMBERS ~~AND THE MEMBERS UNDER SUBSECTIONS (A)(2)(VI) OF THIS SECTION~~, be proficient in American Sign Language.

Upon the recommendation and appointment of qualified representatives, all Board members would hold equal status and responsibility in carrying out the Board's duties.

As a reminder, the purpose of establishing this licensure requirement is to protect consumers and to strengthen the integrity of the interpreting profession. With these considerations in mind, MDAD respectfully requests a favorable report on SB 645, inclusive of the amendments offered by Senator King and the amendments proposed in this testimony.

Thank you,

MDAD Board of Directors