

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
Senate Bill 645
State Board of Sign Language Interpreters – Membership and Licensing

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
February 26, 2026

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Vice President

The Maryland State Education Association supports, with amendments, Senate Bill 645, which would expand the membership of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) and require the nomination process to include outreach to underrepresented deaf, deafblind, and interpreter communities. It would also alter the dates by which the Board must establish certain licensing requirements and by which sign language interpreters must meet certain licensing requirements. Importantly, it would require the SBSLI's promulgation process to include a report to the Governor and General Assembly on our state's interpreter workforce and, as amended by the sponsor, add experience-based pathways to licensure.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 44 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA is proud to represent educational interpreters across our state, and we share the sponsor's goal of ensuring access to qualified interpreters for all who benefit from their services. We appreciate that this bill seeks to revise portions of the law that are likely to pose barriers to qualified and experienced educational interpreters serving students and families. Many of those services are essential to both educational equity and compliance with federal law: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.¹

We believe that the following amendments would strengthen this bill and support our state's commitment to a well-staffed and highly qualified interpreter workforce:

¹ NAD – Section 504 and ADA – Obligations of Public Schools. <https://www.nad.org/resources/education/k-12-education/section-504-and-ada-obligations-of-public-schools/>

Implementation timeline

- **Deadline to establish licensure requirements:** In §9-2414(a)(2), revise the date by which the Board is required to establish and publish licensure requirements from December 31, 2026 to **July 1, 2027** to ensure adequate time for a review of workforce data, public comment, and evaluation by the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR).
- **Deadline to meet licensure requirements:** In Section 4, adjust the date by which interpreters must achieve licensure from July 1, 2027 to **July 1, 2028** to provide adequate time for the SBSLI to communicate the newly established requirements to interpreters and allow interpreters to obtain the necessary credentials, gather documentation, and complete the application process. This is especially important if the final requirements include licensure tests like the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), for which scoring can take up to a year.² We strongly advise that the deadline is in July rather than January to avoid the potential disruption of new requirements taking effect mid-school year.

Workforce considerations

- **Adding county-by-county data:** Specify in §9-2407 that the SBSLI's report should include the number of licensed interpreters **by county**, not just statewide. This context is important to ensure that counties with fewer licensed interpreters will not be disproportionately impacted by the newly established regulations.
- **Welcoming licensed interpreters from out of state:** Ensure that Maryland can seamlessly recruit licensed interpreters from other states by replacing “may” in §9-2420(a) with “shall” and striking the additional conditions placed on out-of-state applicants in §9-2420(b)(2) and (c).

Licensure requirements

- **Recognizing years of service:** We appreciate the sponsor's commitment to adding an amendment that expands pathways to a provisional license by replacing “and” with “or” in §9-2419(3)(i). This change allows the SBSLI to recognize the successful long-term service of an interpreter toward meeting their licensure requirements.
- **Streamlining provisional licensure:** Strike §9-2425(c), which adds provisional license restrictions that create ambiguity about educational interpreters' ability to serve in settings with legal components, like Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.

With these amendments, we would ask the committee for a favorable report.

² Announcements – EIPA Classroom Interpreting. <https://classroominterpreting.org/announcements>