



**SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**  
**Senate Bill 645**  
**State Board of Sign Language Interpreters - Membership and Licensing**  
**February 26, 2026**  
**Favorable with Amendment**

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 645. The bill seeks to expand and restructure the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, broaden representation to include underrepresented Deaf, DeafBlind, and interpreter communities, require proactive outreach in the nomination process, and extend the deadline for establishing licensing requirements to December 31, 2026. It also establishes July 1, 2027 as the date by which interpreters must meet new licensing requirements.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

The USM deeply appreciates the bill's intention and thanks the Maryland Hospital Association for including us in the advocacy around this important issue. Raising standards, expanding representation, and strengthening accountability are goals we all share.

Each USM institution relies heavily on high-quality, campus-embedded interpreters and interpreter-training pathways to fulfill federal ADA obligations and to support Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, faculty, staff, and community partners. Currently, USM institutions face difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified interpreters, particularly for specialized academic disciplines. With suggested amendments, this law would promote consistency while not unintentionally narrowing the available pool of interpreters and increasing costs or delays in service provision. Any disruption to interpreter availability, particularly during a statewide interpreter shortage, may impact the very communities Senate Bill 645 aims to support.

Also, we appreciate the commitment to establishing professional standards for sign language interpreters in Maryland and are grateful for the proposed amendments that would help ensure the new law does not create significant challenges for colleges and universities that

rely on interpreters to ensure communication access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

USM supports Senate Bill 645's goals of inclusivity, accountability, and professionalization, and respectfully urge the Committee to ensure that Senate Bill 645 is implemented in partnership with higher-education institutions, Deaf-community leaders, interpreter-training faculty, disability-services professionals, and the statewide network of interpreters.

The USM appreciates the opportunity to provide this testimony regarding Senate Bill 645.

