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SB0645 – State Board of Sign Language Interpreters – Membership and Licensing

February 26, 2026

Education, Energy, and the Environment

SUPPORT with AMENDMENTS

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Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports with amendments **SB0645 – State Board of Sign Language Interpreters – Membership and Licensing**. This bill expands the membership of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (Board) and delays the date by which sign language interpreters must meet licensing requirements from July 1, 2024, to December 31, 2026.

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act requires that State and local governments, including county boards of education, communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities, including deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind individuals. Under federal law, county boards are required to provide auxiliary aids and services when needed to communicate effectively with individuals with a communication disability. For individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind, this includes providing sign language interpretation services.

AACPS supports the licensure of sign language interpreters in Maryland to ensure that students and parents/guardians have access to high-quality sign language interpretation services, thus ensuring equitable access and opportunity to participate in the educational program. However, amendments are necessary to ensure that this legislation does not result in a shortage of certified interpreters in the State and subsequent denial of educational services for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind students and parents/guardians. AACPS supports the amendments proposed by the Public School Superintendent's Association of Maryland.

Licensure Timeline

As written, SB0645 becomes effective October 1, 2026, the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters is required to publish regulations by December 1, 2026, and the licensure requirements established in regulation become effective July 1, 2027. Given the proposed changes to the composition of the Board, it is unlikely that the Board will be able to convene and promulgate regulations by the end of 2026. Additionally, six months between regulation adoption and the implementation of licensure requirements is insufficient to allow individuals to seek and obtain licensure, even the provisional licensure established in current law. AACPS employs a limited number of sign language interpreters and utilizes interpretation agencies to provide sign language interpretation services to our students and parents/guardians. Insufficient time to meet the licensure requirements established by the Board creates the potential for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind students and parents/guardians to be denied access to the educational program due to a lack of qualified interpreters in the State. High quality interpretation should not come at the expense of access to educational services for our students. The framework for licensure of sign language interpreters in Maryland must create viable pathways for interpreters working in the educational setting to pursue certification, while still providing interpretation services to our students and parents/guardians.

Educational Representation

Given the interest that has been expressed by the Board regarding certifying interpreters in the educational setting, AACPS believes that educational institutions should be recognized in the Board's composition and as a specialty area in §9-2414 of the State Government Article. Local school systems have federal and State obligations to provide for

the education of students, representation on the Board ensures that licensure requirements will not conflict with these obligations.

Consumer Choice

AACPS supports consumer choice regarding sign language interpretation services but is also cognizant of the constraints that currently exist regarding the provision of sign language interpretation services. While AACPS relies on both staff sign language interpreters and agency interpreters to meet the needs of students and parent/guardians, it is not always feasible to obtain in person interpretation services when requested. It is important that there is flexibility to provide interpretation services through a non-preferred delivery method to ensure that State licensure requirements do not conflict the federal and State legal obligations of school systems to students, such as the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. AACPS proposes that §9-2415 of the State Government Article be amended to require that interpretation services be provided in the method preferred by the deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind individual to the extent practicable.

Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** committee report on SB0645.