UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND MEDICAL SYSTEM

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

POSITION: Favorable
March 31, 2026
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

The University of Maryland Medical System ("UMMS") strongly supports Senate Bill 645 – State Board of Sign Language Interpreters – Membership and Licensing. Senate Bill 645 ("SB 645") would make alterations to the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act (2023), including expanding membership of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters ("SBSLI") to include several licensed interpreters for the deaf and hard of hearing and requiring the Board to draft and submit a report to the General Assembly before adopting regulations governing specialty areas such as legal, medical, and behavioral health settings. **The bill is in the same posture as HB 1192, which this Committee (17-0) and the House (126-0) passed unanimously earlier this month**.

UMMS greatly appreciates the bill sponsor introducing this legislation to strengthen the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (the "Board") and the Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act (the "Act"), which was originally passed in 2023. The Act requires that sign language interpreters in Maryland meet national certification standards and that deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the State have access to competent and qualified sign language interpretation services. By expanding the number of licensed interpreters on the Board and requiring that at least three Board members provide services with an interpreter agency or in educational, legal, and medical settings, SB 645 will add important viewpoints and expertise to the Board. These viewpoints will be particularly essential over the next year as the Board develops its initial license requirements and regulations governing the licensing process. UMMS strongly supports the initial licensing framework created by the General Assembly and believes that SB 645 will provide important and targeted changes and clarifications to assist the Board with finalizing the licensing requirements.

UMMS is committed to improving the lives and wellbeing of the patients we serve, and this includes providing high-quality interpretation services to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Our hospitals, emergency departments, freestanding medical facilities, urgent care centers, and other health care facilities contract with leading sign language interpretation service providers for in-person and video remote interpreting ("VRI") services. And at least two hospitals also employ a full-time medical interpreter in American Sign Language. All interpreters, whether in person or VRI, meet the National Association of the Deaf ("NAD"), Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf ("RID"), or Board of Evaluation for Interpreters ("BEI") certification standards, which serve as the basis for sign language interpreter licensing

requirements in the Act. In FY25, UMMS acute care hospitals alone utilized the services of qualified ASL interpreters for more than 9,000 patient encounters (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. FY2025 ASL Interpretation Services, by Hospital

Member Organization	FY 2025 Total	
	VRI	In-person
UM Baltimore Washington Medical Center	558	
UM Charles Regional Medical Center	237	
University of Maryland Medical Center	5,806	430
UM Shore Regional Health	373	
UM Capital Region Health	538	10
UM Saint Joseph Medical Center	160	33
UM Upper Chesapeake Health	609	
UM Rehabilitation and Orthopaedic Institute	611	
Total	8,892	473

As amended, SB 645 proposes common sense alterations to the Act, which will assist the Board in developing and implementing a successful licensing scheme and promoting the growth of the sign language interpreter profession in Maryland. These amendments are based on discussions with certified sign language interpreters and agencies, stakeholders across the education, judicial, and health care sectors, and a comprehensive review of the Act and the draft regulations developed by the Board to license Sign Language Interpreters to implement the Act, which were published in the Maryland Register on May 16, 2025. UMMS appreciates the hard work and leadership of the sponsor on this bill and issue and strongly supports the bill as amended.

UMMS is grateful for the following critical amendments that were adopted by the bill sponsor:

1. Clarifying that public entities are required to provide reasonable accommodations to support the preferences indicated by deaf and hard of hearing individuals to the extent practicable and in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
2. Requiring the Board to waive licensing requirements for an interpreter who is licensed in another State with substantially equivalent qualifications.
3. Extending the deadline for individuals providing interpreting services to be licensed to January 1, 2028, which will allow the Board to implement the provisions of this bill and develop comprehensive regulations.

For these reasons, the University of Maryland Medical System supports SB 645, as amended, and requests a ***favorable*** report on the bill.

For more information, please contact:

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