



Testimony - SB 645, State Board of Sign Language Interpreters -  
Membership and Licensing  
Favorable

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

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Honorable Chairwoman Wells & Members of the House Government, Labor, and  
Elections Committee:

SEIU Local 500, which represents more than 20,000 education workers across  
Maryland—including American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters on staff at  
Montgomery County Public Schools—we respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate  
Bill 645.

Our ASL interpreters play a critical role in ensuring that deaf and hard of hearing  
students have full and equitable access to education. They are not ancillary staff—they  
are essential to compliance with federal law, to student achievement, and to the  
fundamental promise of public education.

SB 645 is an important step toward strengthening the interpreting profession and  
improving services for students across Maryland.

This bill makes several meaningful improvements to the State's interpreter licensing  
framework. It expands and diversifies the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters,  
ensuring broader representation across the field, including individuals connected to  
educational settings.

For our members, that representation matters. ASL interpreters working in public  
schools face unique challenges—ranging from specialized educational vocabulary and

student-specific needs to the realities of staffing shortages and inconsistent standards. Ensuring that the Board includes voices with direct experience in educational settings will lead to more informed policymaking and better outcomes for students.

The bill also:

- Establishes a clearer path toward statewide licensing requirements, while providing additional time for interpreters—particularly those in educational settings—to meet those standards.
- Requires the Board to study and report on the impact of specialty licensure in areas such as educational interpreting before implementing new requirements.
- Improves data collection, including tracking the number of licensed interpreters by county, which will help policymakers better understand workforce shortages and regional disparities.

These provisions are especially important for school systems like Montgomery County, where the demand for qualified ASL interpreters continues to grow. Our members have consistently raised concerns about workforce shortages, inconsistent standards, and the need for professional recognition and support.

SB 645 moves the State in the right direction—but it must be implemented thoughtfully.

We strongly support the bill's inclusion of a study and stakeholder consultation process before imposing specialty licensing requirements. It is critical that any new standards:

Do not unintentionally reduce the already limited pool of interpreters available to schools  
Reflect the realities of educational interpreting  
Include input from working interpreters and the unions that represent them

For SEIU Local 500 members, this bill is about more than licensing—it is about respect for their profession and ensuring that students receive the high-quality services they deserve.

When interpreters are properly supported, trained, and retained:

- Students experience greater access and inclusion
- Schools are better equipped to meet legal and educational obligations

- The workforce becomes more stable and sustainable

SEIU Local 500 urges the Committee to advance SB 645 and continue working with stakeholders—including our union and the ASL interpreters we represent—to ensure successful implementation.

We respectfully urge the committee for a favorable report.

Thank you for your time and consideration.