



BILL: Senate Bill 645
TITLE: State Board of Sign Language Interpreters – Membership and Licensing
HEARING DATE: March 31, 2026
POSITION: FAVORABLE
COMMITTEE: House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

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The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all the State’s local boards of education, and the Public School Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM), representing all the State’s local superintendents, **jointly support, as amended, Senate Bill 645 - State Board of Sign Language Interpreters – Membership and Licensing.**

Senate Bill 645 establishes a thoughtful and practical framework for the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters to build data-informed licensure requirements that will enable Maryland to create high standards for licensure, promote interpreter quality, and ensure continued access for deaf and hard of hearing public school students, hospital patients, and others who rely on interpreter services across public systems. MABE and PSSAM strongly support these goals and appreciate the sustained collaboration of the bill’s sponsors, the Governor’s staff, local special education directors and sign language coordinators across our school systems, and the many other stakeholders who contributed to this legislation.

MABE and PSSAM support the establishment of licensure standards to ensure quality for the deaf and hard of hearing community. At the same time, implementing stringent, inflexible standards without a transition framework risks reducing access in parts of the State. Senate Bill 645 bill, as amended, balances raising standards with preserving access and supporting workforce stability. We highlight many provisions of the bill below:

First, the designation of “educational settings” as a recognized specialty area is a welcome improvement. Educational environments present distinct professional standards, role expectations, and competency requirements that warrant the same level of

formal recognition and regulatory consideration afforded to other specialty practice areas, such as legal and medical interpreting.

Second, the bill's reporting requirements are essential to responsible licensure implementation. Requiring the Board to assess and report on certification standards, workforce capacity, and the impact of specialty requirements before finalizing regulations ensures that licensure decisions are grounded in data and workforce realities. This is particularly important for school systems that already face challenges due to interpreter shortages.

Third, the consumer choice provision in the current bill appropriately balances individual preference with operational feasibility, and now aligns with the Americans with Disabilities Act, reflecting a practical and legally grounded approach. This preserves access while accounting for real-world service constraints.

Fourth, the bill's recognition of waivers for interpreters who meet standards but are licensed outside of Maryland will support workforce mobility. This is an important mechanism critical to maintaining and expanding access during the transition to licensure.

Finally, board composition and governance remain central to the success of the licensure effort. The board, of course, includes members of the deaf and hard of hearing community, whose lived experience is essential, and will include representation from the systems responsible for delivering services, including schools, hospitals, and courts. Those responsible for implementation – who also have experience working within the interpreter and deaf and hard of hearing communities – must have a voice in shaping the standards that will govern their work.

Senate Bill 645, as amended, provides a responsible and balanced transition framework toward high licensure standards while preserving access and supporting the stability and growth of the interpreter workforce.

For these reasons, MABE and PSSAM jointly support Senate Bill 645 and request a favorable report.