

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

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
March 31, 2026

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Vice President

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 645 as amended, which would expand the membership of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters (SBSLI) and require the nomination process to include outreach to underrepresented deaf, deafblind, and interpreter communities. It would also alter the dates by which the Board must establish certain licensing requirements and by which sign language interpreters must meet certain licensing requirements. Importantly, it would require the SBSLI's promulgation process to include a report to the Governor and General Assembly on our state's interpreter workforce and, as amended by the sponsor, add experience-based pathways to licensure.

MSEA represents 76,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 44 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

MSEA is proud to represent educational interpreters across our state, and we share the sponsor's goal of ensuring access to qualified interpreters for all who benefit from their services. We appreciate that this bill seeks to revise portions of the law that are likely to pose barriers to qualified and experienced educational interpreters serving students and families. Many of those services are essential to both educational equity and compliance with federal law: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.¹

We believe that the amendments to this bill support our state's commitment to a well-staffed and highly qualified interpreter workforce. In particular, the amendments that provide a school year-aligned licensure timeline for educational interpreters and authorize the Board to consider interpreter experience toward licensure will strengthen licensure implementation.

We ask the committee for a favorable report on Senate Bill 645 as amended.

¹ NAD – Section 504 and ADA – Obligations of Public Schools. <https://www.nad.org/resources/education/k-12-education/section-504-and-ada-obligations-of-public-schools/>