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CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
BALTIMORE COUNTY
CHAIR

HON. RICHARD SANDY
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MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

TO:	House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
FROM:	Legislative Committee Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq. 410-260-1523
RE:	Senate Bill 645 State Board of Sign Language Interpreters – Membership and Licensing
DATE:	March 26, 2026 (3/31)

INFORMATIONAL COMMENT PAPER WITH REQUESTED AMENDMENTS

The Judiciary respects the separation of powers doctrine and acknowledges the policy-making authority of the legislative branch. As such, the Judiciary has no position on the policy aims of this legislation.

In addition, the Judiciary appreciates the amendments that addressed some of the Judiciary's concerns previously noted. The Judiciary, however, still notes the below strong concerns regarding video remote interpreting and requests that the Committee consider additional amendments.

Video Remote Interpreting. There is a provision of the original Sign Language Interpreter Act which remains a concern and which the Judiciary recommends be amended. The current statute requires an individual be licensed by the SBSLI before providing sign language interpretation in the state including individuals who are providing video remote interpreting (VRI) services. **The Judiciary requests the bill be amended with the attached proposed amendments to address the video remote interpreting concerns.**

Use of National Call Center for VRI. The Maryland Judiciary contracts with a vendor that provides on-demand video-remote ASL interpreter services. The vendor provides services 24-hours a day, 7 days a week to meet the exigent needs of deaf court visitors by tapping into a national network of certified ASL interpreters. If a Maryland license is required, the Judiciary will lose access to this important on-demand service as few interpreters outside the state will have a Maryland license and will have little incentive to acquire one.

24/7 Judiciary Services. Access to a national or regional call center is essential to ensure access to video remote interpreting on demand when needed to support the 24/7 operations of the Maryland courts. This will facilitate the effective and appropriate use of on-demand services at service counters and for walk-in services including court help centers, clerk's counters, and commissioner stations.

Members of the public may appear before the courts to apply for or respond to emergency proceedings including protective orders, peace orders, emergency custody proceedings, and initial appearances. District Court commissioners, for example, are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Commissioners conduct initial appearances, issue charging documents, set and accept bonds, and determine conditions of pretrial release for individuals arrested within the District Court's jurisdiction. Commissioners also hear petitions for peace and protective orders during hours when the courts are otherwise closed. Courts are obliged to hear these matters within strict timelines.

Communicating Postponements. In addition, there are times when no interpreter has been requested or when an interpreter is not available. The court may need to be able to explain the situation to a deaf or hard of hearing individual, or to communicate effectively so the matter can be reset. The court needs to be able to use on demand services like VRI interpreters in these instances.

Usage. In fiscal year 2025, the Judiciary used a vendor to provide on demand remote ASL services for 307 sessions. VRI services are available on demand at clerk's counters, court help centers, commissioner stations, and when there are exigent circumstances requiring a sign language interpreter on short notice. Services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to ensure the Judiciary can respond quickly and efficiently to the needs of the public.

cc. Hon. Nancy King
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor

BY: Maryland Judicial Conference

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 645
(Favorable with Amendments Copy)

Amendment No.1

On page 7, line 11, strike “govern” and replace with “AUTHORIZE”

On page 7, line 12, after “setting” insert “BY INTERPRETERS HOLDING A MARYLAND LICENSE OR A NATIONALLY OR REGIONALLY RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION