



HOUSE GOVERNMENT, LABOR, AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 645
State Board of Sign Language Interpreters - Membership and Licensing
March 31, 2026
Favorable as Amended

Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 645. The bill seeks to expand and restructure the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, broaden representation to include underrepresented Deaf, DeafBlind, and interpreter communities. Each University System of Maryland (USM) institution relies heavily on high-quality, campus-embedded interpreters and interpreter-training pathways to fulfill federal ADA obligations and to support Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, faculty, staff, and community partners.

The USM is comprised of twelve distinguished institutions, and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the State. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

Currently, USM institutions face difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified interpreters, particularly for specialized academic disciplines. As amended, Senate Bill 645 would promote consistency while not unintentionally narrowing the available pool of interpreters and increasing costs or delays in service provision.

As amended, Senate Bill 645 requires public entities to provide reasonable accommodations to support the preferences indicated by the deaf and hard of hearing individuals "***...to the extent practicable and in compliance with 28 C.F.R. § 35.160 and the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.***" That amendment, along with a January 1, 2028 implementation date helps ensure the new law does not create significant challenges for colleges and universities that rely on interpreters to ensure communication access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

USM supports Senate Bill 645's goals of inclusivity and accountability and look forward to working with State Board of Sign Language Interpreters to evaluate and deliver this critical service for students, staff, and faculty.



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