

Wes Moore
Governor

Usherla DeBerry
Director

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor



TO: Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

FROM: Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

SUBJECT: Testimony on SB645/HB1192 (State Board of Sign Language Interpreters - Membership and Licensing)

Position: Favorable as Amended

HEARING DATE: March 31, 2026

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

My name is Usherla DeBerry, and I serve as the Director of the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH). I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of SB645 as amended.

This bill strengthens the structure and functioning of the State Board of Sign Language Interpreters, ensuring that the licensing, oversight, and professional standards of interpreters meet best practices and reflect the needs of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders.

This expansion ensures decision-making reflects the lived experiences and needs of the communities served, particularly those with unique communication access requirements. Including DeafBlind representation recognizes the distinct needs of this community, which has historically been underrepresented in policy discussions.

The bill updates licensing timelines, requirements, and professional expectations for interpreters. This ensures interpreters meet current best practices, ethical standards, and are accountable to both the public and the communities they serve. High-quality, professional interpreting is critical in schools, hospitals, courts, workplaces, and government offices.

SB645 also emphasizes informing the public about interpreter licensing and standards, helping individuals and organizations understand interpreter qualifications. This promotes safer and more equitable access to communication across all sectors.

ODHH is tasked with:

- Serving as an information clearinghouse on issues affecting Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals
- Promoting access to services and culturally competent practices

Supporting SB645 advances these statutory goals by enhancing access to professional interpreting, including community voices in policymaking, and improving coordination between government agencies, interpreters, and the communities served.

Passing SB645 will:

- Build a stronger, accountable interpreter workforce
- Ensure inclusive governance reflecting community diversity
- Promote equity and accessibility in education, healthcare, legal, and public service settings
- Reduce barriers and improve outcomes for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Marylanders

For these reasons, the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing strongly supports SB645 as amended and urges a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

Usherla DeBerry

Director

Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing