

EDUCATION ADVOCACY COALITION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 879: Language Acquisition Tracking Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children—Establishment

February 25, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC) is a coalition of nearly 50 organizations and individuals committed to advancing education policies that protect and support Maryland students with disabilities. The EAC supports House Bill 879, which will establish a statewide language acquisition tracking program within the Maryland State Department of Education so Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, and Hard of Hearing children can develop age-appropriate language skills on par with their peers.

The EAC particularly appreciates that House Bill 879 offers families the opportunity to choose whether the child's progress will be tracked in sign language, spoken language or both; this maintains the focus on the acquisition of language skills without requiring families to become enmeshed in philosophical debates about language. The EAC also appreciates the requirement that a child's Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP), Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 plan be revised to include specific strategies, services and programs if the child is not demonstrating progress.

Language acquisition is essential to the development of cognitive, social and emotional development. If enacted, House Bill 879 will ensure that children who are Deaf, DeafBlind, DeafDisabled or Hard of Hearing will have the same opportunity for language acquisition that their peers have, with required steps if they fall behind.

For these reasons, the EAC supports House Bill 879.

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Respectfully submitted,

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