



FULTON SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

Department of English

1101 Camden Avenue

Salisbury, MD 21801-6860

410-543-6445

1-888-543-0148

TTY 410-543-6080

FAX 410-548-2142

www.salisbury.edu

February 25, 2026

The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins, Chair
The Honorable Jessica Feldmark, Vice Chair
and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee
Maryland General Assembly

**RE: HB807 – Education - Teacher Preparation Programs - English Language Learner Teacher
Competency Requirements
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Derya Kulavuz-Onal, and I am a tenured Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the English Department at Salisbury University. In my role, I prepare future ESOL teachers in our undergraduate and graduate TESOL programs and supervise ESOL teacher candidates during their internship experiences. I am writing in strong support of HB807, with one amendment.

I especially support the bill's requirement for additional preparation in teacher education programs related to English learner (EL) / Multilingual Learner (ML) competencies, including understanding English as a Second language development, creating equitable literacy learning opportunities, working with linguistically diverse students and families, and integrating EL-related teacher competencies across the teacher preparation curriculum.

This provision is critically important for Maryland's schools and for the future teachers we prepare. In today's classrooms, teachers across grade levels and subject areas increasingly work with multilingual learners. Yet many teacher candidates still receive limited preparation for how second language development affects learning, assessment, participation, and literacy development in content-area classrooms. As a result, new teachers at the early childhood, elementary, and secondary levels often enter the profession without the knowledge and tools needed to support multilingual learners effectively.

In practice, this often leads to overreliance on ESOL teachers, as if they are the only educators responsible for the academic success of English learners. Over time, this creates an inequitable model in which multilingual learners may become isolated in content classrooms – especially in schools where ESOL

support is limited or not consistently available, including rural schools served by itinerant ESOL teachers. HB807 is important because it affirms a central principle: the education and success of English learners are the responsibility of all teachers, not only ESOL specialists.

I also strongly support that the bill calls not only for additional training, but also for the inclusion of EL-related competencies throughout the curriculum. This is essential. Preparation to work with multilingual learners should not be treated as a one-time topic or confined to a single course. Teacher candidates benefit most when they develop these competencies across methods, literacy, assessment, and clinical practice courses, where they can apply language-supportive teaching in real instructional contexts and learn how to provide differentiated instruction through informed pedagogy.

At the same time, I believe a stand-alone course focused specifically on English learners/multilingual learners remains necessary. A dedicated course provides the depth needed to understand language development, EL pedagogy, and family/community engagement, while curriculum-wide integration reinforces and applies those ideas across teacher preparation.

Currently, Salisbury University is the only university in Maryland that offers a B.A. in ESOL with K–12 certification, allowing students to become licensed ESOL teachers without first completing a master’s degree. Across the state, TESOL degrees are otherwise typically offered only at the graduate level. Yet, including Salisbury University, many teacher education programs around the state do not require sufficient EL/ML-focused preparation for all teacher candidates in early childhood, elementary, and secondary education programs. At the same time, Maryland’s K–12 student population is becoming increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse, while many teacher candidates enter the profession with limited foreign language study and little formal preparation in multilingual learner pedagogies.

This gap has real consequences. Many teachers lack confidence in supporting multilingual learners—not because they are unwilling, but because they have not had the training. Later, this lack of knowledge is compounded by the realities of classroom demands and limited time for differentiation and/or necessary ongoing professional development. If HB807 passes, teacher candidates across Maryland will be better equipped, more knowledgeable, and more confident in supporting multilingual learners. They will also be better prepared to collaborate meaningfully with ESOL teachers and share responsibility for student success.

I have also observed the need for this training firsthand. In some schools, content teachers are increasingly assigned to sheltered instruction classes in which all or the majority of students are English learners learning academic content, yet the content teachers have had no prior EL-focused preparation. In one such classroom I observed recently, for instance, the teacher relied heavily on the ESOL teacher and an ESOL intern not only for instructional support, but even for guidance on how to communicate with multilingual families mid-semester. Without that support, the teacher would have struggled significantly; meanwhile, it was heart-breaking to see that it did not occur to that teacher to learn about the ways of communicating with multilingual families until then (in this case, it was learning about the necessary language translation app), although the teacher had been working in the schools for a few years already. Experiences like this have reinforced for me how urgently Maryland needs required EL-focused preparation for all teacher candidates.

Suggested Amendment

I respectfully recommend one amendment to strengthen the bill’s implementation:

Require that the 3-credit EL/ELL-focused course be taught by a faculty member with a Ph.D. in TESOL, Applied Linguistics, Bilingual Education, or a closely related field that includes expertise in both language and education.

This amendment would help ensure that the required course is not only offered, but taught by faculty with appropriate disciplinary expertise. Without such expertise, the requirement may not achieve its intended purpose, and the quality of preparation could vary substantially across programs.

I also believe the bill's timeline is reasonable and workable for teacher education programs. While many programs are already credit-heavy, curriculum revision is a normal part of educator preparation, especially as certification requirements evolve. At Salisbury University, for example, our B.A. in ESOL K-12 Certification program has undergone multiple revisions in recent years in response to MSDE requirements. These changes have increased program demands, but they have ultimately strengthened teacher preparation for the benefit of multilingual learners in K-12 schools. I believe other Maryland programs can make similar adjustments in ways that better serve both teacher candidates and multilingual learners, and this bill may be the push that they need to make this happen.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB807, with consideration of the amendment above.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derya Kulavuz-Onal', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Derya Kulavuz-Onal, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and TESOL
Salisbury University
Salisbury, Maryland
dxkulavuz-onal@salisbury.edu