



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 25, 2026

HB879 Language Acquisition Tracking Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children - Establishment

Good afternoon Madame Chair, Madame Vice Chair and members of the Ways & Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about House Bill 879.

Research shows that language deprivation occurring during the first few years of life is a leading cause of delays in cognitive and social-emotional development for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.¹ In response, several states have passed legislation establishing Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) tracking programs to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children are reaching the same language acquisition milestones as their hearing peers. HB879 represents a culmination of multiple years of work to create a framework for a language acquisition tracking program in Maryland.

Parents and guardians of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children need clear, evidence-based information about their child's language learning, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children deserve the chance to meet the same language milestone goals as their peers. Establishing a language acquisition tracking program in Maryland will provide Deaf and Hard of Hearing children more opportunities to gain a strong language foundation – a core necessity for their growth and development.

HB879 will establish a language acquisition tracking Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). The bill establishes a State Coordinator within MSDE, as well as an Advisory Council that will work alongside the State Coordinator to create parent/guardian resources to assist in tracking their child's progress in language acquisition, as well as an assessment tool used by educators and specialists to monitor the child's progress in parallel. A child who participates in the Language Acquisition Tracking Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children will be assessed for language acquisition skills from entry into the program until age 9 – the most critical years for language learning.

I am offering two sponsor amendments, both in consensus with stakeholders. One changes the schedule for required assessments to every six months from ages 0-5 and annually until age 9; the other adds two representatives to the Advisory Council: a speech-language pathologist (SLP) who has experience working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and uses spoken language, and another SLP with experience working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children who uses American Sign Language.

Affording Deaf and Hard of Hearing children access to language acquisition tools is a matter that goes beyond the home and the classroom – it sets them on a path to a healthy, successful life. I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 879.

¹ <https://www.nad.org/implications-of-language-deprivation-for-young-deaf-deafblind-deafdisabled-and-hard-of-hearing-children/>