

SB 502 and HB 879 — Maryland Language Acquisition Tracking Program

One-Page Legislator Brief

The problem

Maryland lacks consistent, statewide data to track whether deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) children are acquiring language on time. Without routine tracking, language delays can go unnoticed, increasing later costs (more intensive special education support and reduced long-term workforce participation).

What SB 502/HB 879 do

- Creates a statewide Language Acquisition Tracking Program in MSDE for D/HH children under age 9 with an IFSP, IEP, or 504 plan.
- Requires an approved assessment tool to track language acquisition (signed, spoken, or both—parent choice).
- Assesses within 6 months of diagnosis and every 6 months for age 0-5 thereafter annually until age 9 (parents may opt out in writing).
- Allows results to inform the IFSP/IEP/504 and requires updates when progress is not being made, including strategies and services.

Accountability and coordination

- Establishes an MSDE State Coordinator to implement the program, set benchmarks, and oversee data tracking.
- Creates an Advisory Council (including parents and Deaf community representation) to approve the assessment tool and review reporting.

Reporting: Maryland finally gets usable statewide data

Beginning July 1, 2028 (and annually), MSDE must publish a report comparing D/HH children's language acquisition to peers, disaggregated by key factors (e.g., modality, hearing level, additional disabilities, race, and where possible services/geography).

Why this saves money and grows Maryland's workforce

- Early language access reduces expensive remediation later by identifying gaps sooner and targeting supports when intervention is most effective.
- Full access to language supports literacy, graduation, and employment—improving lifetime earnings and reducing reliance on SSI/Medicaid and other public benefits.
- The goal is more Deaf Marylanders able to work, contribute to the economy, and be tax-paying citizens.

Key dates

- Effective: July 1, 2026.
- First annual public report due: July 1, 2028.

Resource

- tiny.cc/marylandleadk