

Maryland Association of the Deaf
Written Testimony
SB 346 - Maryland Sign Language Interpreters Act
Tuesday, February 14, 2023

The Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) is proud of the community's work on the Maryland Sign Language Interpreter Act and we are excited to be in the home stretch. The Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and interpreting communities are proud to have collaborated extensively in developing this bill. We have also worked closely with Senator Nancy King and 7 other sponsors, and Delegate Heather Bagnall and 12 other sponsors who have been incredible and invaluable sponsors of this landmark legislative bill.

During his campaign, Governor Moore pledged that "no one is left behind." However, there is one thing the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and the DeafBlind communities would like to see left behind: the scrounge of fraudulent and unqualified sign language interpreters. There are laws, regulations, and licensure requirements ensuring businesses, agencies, contractors, and the like in certain industries provide quality products and services with the knowledge that they will be held accountable for wrongdoings, abuse, and/or fraud. When unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters are allowed to operate with impunity in the state of Maryland, resulting in egregious actions that have a significant effect on the communities they profess to serve, the costs are significant: physical, emotional, mental, and financial. As an example, one Deaf upper middle class married couple with two children under the ages of 5 years old in Montgomery County racked up nearly \$40,000 in medical expenses due to unqualified sign language interpreters' ineffective skills at providing suitable communication access with their doctors.

The challenges of ineffective communication access provided by unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters can literally be a matter of life or death—critical information is either not appropriately relayed or omitted entirely. MDAD has heard dozens upon dozens of these types of stories from not only our members, but the community at large. The harmful repercussions have a far reaching and chilling effect on the quality of life for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Maryland citizens.

With this bill, the Deaf, DeafBlind, and the Hard of Hearing communities in Maryland can be greatly assured that agencies, businesses, and organizations are legally obligated to hire licensed sign language interpreters in order to provide sufficient and appropriate communication access. These interpreters will operate with the knowledge that continued possession of their licenses hinge on acceptable performance and conduct. Otherwise, they will be held accountable by the licensure board, as outlined in the bill.

We would like to put a stop to the brazenly obvious disregard these unqualified and/or fraudulent sign language interpreters exhibit towards the communities they claim to serve in Maryland. Our communities have waited a long time for this overdue and very necessary consumer protection bill. On their behalf, MDAD strongly encourages you to favor this important bill.

Thank you in advance for your support.

MDAD Board of Directors