



State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board Special Meeting
Wednesday, August 27, 2025
Via Zoom

In Attendance

Board Members

Jacob Leffler, Community Member and Chair
Leslie Puzio, Community Member and Vice Chair
Susan Beaver, Community Member
Absent: Paige Franklin, DeafBlind Representative

Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH)

Usherla DeBerry, Director
Tanea Brown, Outreach/Interpreter Coordinator

Others

Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General
Anna Rose and Gavin Gobble Baker, Interpreters
Community members (non-participating; viewers only)

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jacob Leffler at 7:03 PM.

Vice Chair Leslie Puzio moved to approve the agenda as written, and Sue Beaver seconded the motion. The Board passed the agenda with unanimous consent.

The Board convened to discuss departmentally proposed changes to the Act by GODHH.

The first proposed change concerns licensure requirements. Currently, the law states that individuals must hold certification to obtain general licensure, with no allowance for alternative pathways. The Board reaffirmed its commitment to revising this language to permit other criteria for licensure as designated by the Board, thereby recognizing alternative pathways. The Board agreed that this technical change reflects community priorities and reiterated support for its inclusion in the 2026 proposal.

The Board consists of seven members: designated representatives from MDAD, PCRID, and the DeafBlind community, along with four community members. GODHH noted that PCRID has recommended the removal of its designated seat, replacing it with a licensed interpreter

representative. Director DeBerry clarified that PCRID cited its 501(c)(3) status and multistate membership as reasons for questioning the appropriateness of a designated seat. The Board agreed that Chair Leffler will meet with PCRID and discuss this further.

The Board then considered GODHH's proposal that the Board maintain a 51% Deaf majority. Members expressed support for this principle, though discussion highlighted the need for balance and specificity within community seats. Suggestions included designating two Deaf community members and two hearing community members to ensure diversity of perspectives while meeting majority requirements.

GODHH further proposed eliminating the statutory requirement that Board members be Maryland residents, expanding eligibility to interpreters in the larger region (including D.C. and Virginia). The Board opposed this change, emphasizing that, as a Maryland state body, membership should remain limited to state residents to maintain accountability, credibility, and alignment with state governance standards.

The Board reaffirmed support for recognizing alternative licensure pathways, codifying a 51% Deaf majority, and retaining Maryland residency requirements for Board eligibility. GODHH will follow up with PCRID for further consultation, and Director DeBerry will prepare a report reflecting these discussions.

The Board reviewed discussions surrounding provisional educational pathways. Chair Leffler highlighted the necessity of finding a balance between immediate workforce needs and the educational requirements for licensure, acknowledging feedback from practitioners who face challenges in accessing traditional educational routes. The Board debated the potential benefits of allowing provisional licenses for individuals who are actively pursuing further education while meeting competency requirements based on their current skills and experience. This could open opportunities for qualified interpreters to work under certain supervision or mentorship while completing their educational credentials.

Chair Leffler summarized past deliberations, noting that licensed interpreters are eligible to work in any setting, while educational interpreters are required to hold an EIPA score of 3.7 or higher and to pass the EIPA written exam. Provisional license holders have been previously determined not to work in education.

Member Beaver expressed a change in perspective since the last meeting, recommending that the Board accept the general provisional license to work in K–12 settings. She cited the shortage of certified interpreters in rural Maryland counties and emphasized the risks posed to Deaf students when no interpreter is available. Member Beaver argued that passing the CASLI written exam, which begins a five-year window to complete the performance test, would incentivize interpreters to continue skill development and would also provide access for Deaf interpreters, for whom the EIPA is not accessible. She stressed that Deaf interpreters serve as essential role models for students and should not be excluded.

Vice Chair Puzio disagreed, reaffirming her position that provisional license holders should not be permitted to work in education. She emphasized that the CASLI written exam measures knowledge and ethics but does not evaluate interpreting skills, raising concerns that novices with minimal signing ability could pass and be placed in classrooms. Vice Chair Puzio underscored the Board's mission to ensure quality access for Deaf students, pointing out that parents have consistently requested interpreters with higher demonstrated competency, often

advocating for a minimum of a 4.0 on the EIPA.

The discussion explored possible compromises, such as distinguishing between requirements for Deaf and hearing interpreters, combining the CASLI written with EIPA requirements, or allowing provisional interpreters to work in education only under the oversight of a fully licensed interpreter. Members debated the balance between ensuring qualified access for students and addressing interpreter shortages, particularly in rural areas. Member Beaver stressed the urgent impact on students when interpreters are absent altogether, while Vice Chair Puzio maintained that quality must not be sacrificed for availability.

Chair Leffler acknowledged both perspectives, noting the Board's responsibility to craft clear, enforceable standards while also addressing the real-world needs of schools and families. Members agreed that outreach to parents and school systems regarding their rights and responsibilities remains essential, as well as exploring ways to encourage proper screening and fair compensation for educational interpreters.

Chair Leffler suggests that we research this more further and bring back what we have learned at the next meeting that is coming up in one or two weeks. Chair Leffler thanked all participants for their valuable contributions and expressed appreciation for their ongoing dedication to the work at hand.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.