



**State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board Special Meeting**

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

*Via Zoom*

**In Attendance**

*Board Members*

Jacob Leffler, Community Member and Chair

Leslie Puzio, Community Member and Vice Chair

Susan Beaver, Community Member

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

Usherla DeBerry, Director

Tanea Brown, Outreach/Interpreter Coordinator

Diamon Halliburton, Administrative Assistant

*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 at 7:02 PM

Member Sue Beaver moved to approve the agenda and Vice Chair Leslie Puzio seconded the motion. The motion was carried.

Chair Leffler highlighted the need to discuss interpreter licensure, focusing on three types: fully licensed interpreters, provisionally licensed interpreters, and provisional educational interpreters. General licensed interpreters hold national or regional certifications and can work in any setting. General Provisional licensed interpreters must pass the knowledge and written test and are restricted from legal settings; they may only work in behavioral health or medical contexts if accompanied by a licensed interpreter. Provisional Educational licensed interpreters need to pass a written test and achieve an EIPA score of 3.7, limiting their practice to educational environments.

Chair Leffler acknowledged that Member Paige Franklin has resigned from her position. Chair Leffler expressed gratitude for her dedicated service, insightful feedback, and valuable contributions during her tenure. The Board appreciates her efforts and is hopeful to welcome more members in the near future.

Director Usherla DeBerry expressed gratitude for the opportunity to speak and offered her sincere apologies for the technical difficulties experienced the previous week. She reassured everyone that her office remains committed to supporting the board in its endeavors. Chair Leffler acknowledged Director DeBerry's support and recognized Assistant Attorney General Ethan Sonnenstrahl for his contributions as well.

Chair Leffler opened the meeting by emphasizing the board's role in the licensure of interpreters in Maryland, specifically focusing on the qualifications necessary for obtaining a license. He reiterated that the Board's mission is not to provide jobs to interpreters but to establish standards that govern their practice. Chair Leffler acknowledged the significant volume of emails and feedback received from the community, including interpreters, parents, and community organizations, highlighting the importance of this input in guiding the Board's work. All comments have been shared among Board members for review. He expressed gratitude to the community for their involvement and enthusiasm in supporting the field.

During the meeting, Chair Leffler initiated a discussion on licensure standards for interpreters based on community feedback, specifically addressing issues related to the CASLI written exam for the general provisional license. Member Sue Beaver began by summarizing community feedback regarding the CASLI written exam, noting that while it assesses ethical knowledge and bilingual comprehension, it does not measure production or expressive interpreting skills. She emphasized the importance of receptive ASL skills in ensuring effective communication and preventing misunderstandings in educational interpreting. Vice Chair Leslie Puzio followed, confirming through feedback from recent test-takers that the CASLI ethical exam includes both ASL and English components, with repeatable signed questions and accessible navigation. She noted the exam requires only moderate receptive ASL skill and does not assess interpreting performance. Vice Chair Puzio also shared concerns from parents regarding language access for Deaf and hard-of-hearing children, emphasizing the Board's duty to protect consumers—particularly students—through high professional standards for interpreters.

Chair Leffler reiterated the need for qualified interpreters in K–12 settings, noting that interpreters often serve as primary language models for Deaf students. He highlighted the importance of maintaining high standards while recognizing the interpreter shortages that especially affect rural areas. Both Beaver and Puzio acknowledged the tension between ensuring quality access and addressing workforce limitations. Puzio referenced other states' experiences, explaining that while stricter standards initially created shortages, they ultimately improved interpreter quality and professional recognition. The Board agreed that while consistency and quality are essential, flexibility must be maintained to avoid denying access in underserved regions.

Discussion turned to potential compromises, including allowing provisionally licensed interpreters to work alongside fully licensed interpreters in educational, medical, and mental health settings. Both Beaver and Puzio supported this approach, viewing it as a balanced solution

that upholds standards while addressing staffing challenges. The Board clarified that its role is to set qualifications and regulatory standards not to recruit interpreters while ensuring access to qualified services remains central. Members also discussed public comment procedures and the importance of community input once regulations are drafted.

Vice Chair Puzio and Member Beaver noted that the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH) is responsible for offering ongoing professional development and training to interpreters statewide. Member Beaver proposed drafting a letter to all Maryland school districts with recommendations and contact information to support awareness and compliance.

Vice Chair Puzio moved for the language in the general provisional licensure section to reflect that provisional licensed interpreters will have the ability to work in medical, mental health, and educational K-12 settings alongside a fully licensed interpreter, with the exception of legal settings. Member Sue Beaver seconded this motion. The motion was carried.

Member Sue Beaver moved that the Board approves the regulations with edits from the Assistant Attorney General. It was seconded by Vice Chair Puzio. The motion was carried.

The regulations are set to be finalized after which they will undergo legal review before being sent to GODHH for public comments. The community is encouraged to stay alert for the postings to provide valuable feedback, and there is an open invitation to discuss the regulations further with Board members. Chair Leffler emphasized that this process reflects a collaborative community effort, expressing gratitude for everyone's involvement in bringing the regulations to this stage. Chair Leffler recognizes that this has been a significant undertaking that highlights the partnership between the community and the Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:43PM