Maryland
STATE BOARD OF
SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

State Board of Sign Language Interpreters Board Meeting
Thursday, July 10, 2025
Via Zoom

In Attendance

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

Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GODHH)
Usherla DeBerry, Director
Tanéa Brown, Outreach Interpreter Manager
Diamon Halliburton, Administrative Assistant

Others
Ethan Sonnenstrahl, Assistant Attorney General
ASL/English Interpreters
Community members (non-participating; viewers only)

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM.

The agenda was moved for approval by Vice Chair Puzio and seconded by Franklin; the motion carried. The minutes from the April 2, 2025 meeting were approved following a motion by Vice Chair Puzio and a second by Beaver.

Board Updates:
Chair Leffler noted that the Board has been actively finalizing the regulations. Public commenting began on May 16 and continued with an extended timeline. The Chair thanked the Board for its support and acknowledged the patience of the community. It was noted that the Maryland Association of the Deaf (MDAD) member has resigned since the prior Board meeting due to serving in an interim position with RID. MDAD is working to identify a replacement. It is anticipated that three new representatives will be appointed soon.

GODHH Updates

Director DeBerry thanked the Board and the community for their patience and noted the extension of the public comment period. She is collaborating with the Office of Appointments to fill the open seats for the 3rd Community Representative, MDAD, and PRCID. The delay in filling seats has been related to pending approval. She confirmed that the 2025 Maryland legislation has been keeping staff busy.

Vice Chair Puzio asked whether the Chair and Vice Chair could be copied on communications with the Office of Appointments. Director DeBerry agreed to do so, while adding that communication involving proposed representatives would remain confidential, as those individuals may be considered for other boards.

Vice Chair Puzio asked if it would be helpful for the Board to send a formal letter to express the urgency of the matter. Director DeBerry responded that the Office of Appointments is aware of the urgency, so no letter is necessary.

Director DeBerry shared that all public comments submitted were being logged in a shared spreadsheet, and the Board will decide how to respond to each.

Vice Chair Puzio inquired about updates on two open positions in the GODHH. Director DeBerry noted that recommendations had been made to HR, but the hiring process is currently suspended. She will follow up and report back.

MD One-Stop Portal Update:

Tanéa Brown reported that the MD One-Stop portal will have a “soft launch”. She shared that there will be groups of 5 to register and test the system. These groups will then be able to provide feedback to ODHH for any needed edits. While applications for interpreter licensure can begin on October 1 (early application), the licenses will not be valid until January 1, 2026. Vice Chair Puzio reiterated this point for the audience.

Vice Chair Puzio confirmed that a Board member will participate in soft launch testing, which Manager Brown affirmed. Director DeBerry also tested the system independently and even paid the fee as a donation; the process functioned smoothly.

There were no reports from PRCID or MDAD.

Comments and Regulations Feedback:

Chair Leffler acknowledged that more than 200 comments were received and expressed thanks to the community for providing so many. He stated that the regulations are for everyone, and the feedback will guide future changes.
Key Discussion Areas with the intention of clarifying confusion:

1. Religious Interpreting:

Clarification was sought regarding when a license is required. AAG Sonnenstrahl confirmed that interpreters must be licensed if they are paid, but volunteer interpreters do not require a license. Vice Chair Puzio acknowledged the complexity of responses to this provision. Some expressed concern that exempting religious interpreting from licensure may impact deaf individuals. Chair Leffler noted that many religious interpreters are not certified, which can negatively affect access. Franklin and Vice Chair Puzio both pointed out that interpreters are often congregation members and often offer their services at no charge. The Board agreed to leave the current language in the regulations as-is.

2. 80-Hour Threshold:

There was discussion regarding how to track hours of interpreting work. The Board acknowledged that tracking these hours would be very challenging. It was reiterated that all Interpreters working more than 80 hours must be licensed. Vice Chair Puzio suggested that maybe a system could be established where interpreters submit an ad-hoc license/approval for specific jobs with 60 days' advance notice. This is something the Board needed guidance from the AAG. Vice Chair Puzio suggested that ODHH could use these requests to help track “traveling” interpreters’ hours.

3. Consumer Preferences & Interpreter Availability Windows:

There was discussion about preferring VRI or in-person interpreting, and extending the use of VRI based on an in-person interpreter's response window from 60 minutes to 3 hours. Beaver and Vice Chair Puzio supported the change, acknowledging travel challenges across rural Maryland. Chair Leffler emphasized that agencies must inform customers of their options and interpreters must be licensed regardless of format. Ethan added that violations will trigger Board investigations. The Board moved to change the interpreter response window from 60 minutes to 3 hours—motioned by Beaver, seconded by Vice Chair Puzio, and carried.

Vice Chair Puzio stressed the importance of documenting client preferences both by the interpreter and the agency. Hospitals may not know the regulations, but interpreters are responsible for ensuring compliance.

4. Specializations:

The board discussed holding off implementation of all specializations except educational interpreting.

Beaver led the conversation on educational interpreting. Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) and Public School Superintendents’ Association of Maryland (PSSAM)

requested an extension for compliance until 2028 and lowering EIPA score required. Chair Leffler suggested that the Board provide an additional 6 month grace period for educational interpreters to July 1, 2026 since it better aligns between school years. Vice Chair Puzio emphasized that the law has been known since 2023 and 2026 allows ample time. Parents reportedly favor holding to the 4.0 EIPA standard. Chair Leffler and Vice Chair Puzio noted that it can take nearly a year for results. Beaver agreed with a July 1, 2026 start and mentioned test access via two sites (Largo and Catonsville) and designated administrators. The motion by Vice Chair Puzio to affirm the July 1, 2026 date, seconded by Franklin, was carried.

Vice Chair Puzio stated that the Board may eventually move to require a 4.0 EIPA for a permanent license while allowing 3.7 for provisional licensing. Chair Leffler asked whether the Board should lower the 3.7 minimum; the Board agreed the matter had been sufficiently debated and did not wish to revisit it.

5. Clarifying the Definition of "Agency":

Vice Chair Puzio raised a question about whether hospitals fall under the definition of "agency" in the regulations. Chair Leffler agreed clarification is needed.

6. Policy and Process Questions:

Vice Chair Puzio asked if any of the changes discussed tonight would trigger a 30-day public comment period. AAG Sonnenstrahl answered that substantive changes require such a period, but editorial ones do not.

Chair Leffler noted he would follow up with AAG Sonnenstrahl with additional questions.

Director DeBerry mentioned she is still waiting to hear back from DSD. Chair Leffler proposed holding the next meeting in late July or early August, though Director DeBerry is unavailable next week and will be attending a conference during the first week of August.

Vice Chair Puzio inquired when the next DSD session was and whether Director DeBerry would meet with DSD before or after submitting the regulations, requesting regular communication on this for Board tracking.

<u>Public Comments:</u>

Director DeBerry reassured attendees that this process is standard during regulation changes. Chair Leffler noted that many submitted comments were about license fees. While some find them reasonable, others see them as too high. Vice Chair Puzio responded that the fees are in alignment with those in other states.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:34 PM.