

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1144

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education
Appropriations Subcommittee on Education

Title: An act relating to qualifications for educational interpreters.

Brief Description: Regarding qualifications for educational interpreters.

Sponsors: Representatives Dahlquist, Lytton, Fagan, Haigh, Moscoso, Magendanz, Liias, Ryu and Santos.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 1/29/13, 2/8/13 [DPS];

Appropriations Subcommittee on Education: 2/20/13 [DPS(ED)].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires that, by the 2016-17 school year, all educational interpreters in public schools meet a standard established by the Professional Educator Standards Board on an interpreter assessment.
- Requires that all educational interpreters by the 2019-20 school year also achieve National Interpreter Certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 21 members: Representatives Santos, Chair; Stonier, Vice Chair; Dahlquist, Ranking Minority Member; Magendanz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bergquist, Fagan, Haigh, Hargrove, Hawkins, Hayes, Hunt, Klippert, Lytton, Maxwell, McCoy, Orwall, Parker, Pike, Pollet, Seaquist and Warnick.

Staff: Luke Wickham (786-7146).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In November 2011 there were just over 1,300 students aged 3 through 21 receiving special education in public schools as a result of being hearing impaired, deaf, or deaf-blind. Some of these students need sign language interpretation in order to access their education. Although there are state laws requiring qualified interpreters for legal proceedings, there are no minimum qualifications or standards for interpreters in Washington public schools.

The Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) is the primary national certification for educational interpreters and consists of both a written and performance examination. Other states that have established qualifications for educational interpreters have generally adopted scores ranging from 3.5 - 5 on the EIPA.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

An educational interpreter is defined as a school district employee, whether certificated or classified, who provides sign language translation and further explanation for deaf, deaf-blind, or hearing impaired students. An educational interpreter assessment is defined as a written and performance assessment that is offered by a national organization of professional sign language interpreters that assesses performance in more than one sign language or system.

The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) must adopt standards and identify and publicize educational interpreter assessments that are available. The PESB must also establish a performance standard for each assessment, defining what constitutes a minimum assessment result.

By the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, educational interpreters who are employed by school districts must have successfully achieved the performance standard established by the PESB. By the beginning of the 2019-20 school year, educational interpreters who are employed by school districts must not only meet the performance standard, but also achieve national interpreter certification by the National Association of the Deaf Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

The assessment requirements of the bill do not apply to educational interpreters who are employed to interpret a sign system or sign language for which no educational interpreter assessment has been identified by the PESB.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill added an exemption to the assessment requirements for educational interpreters who are employed to interpret a sign system or sign language for which no educational interpreter assessment has been identified by the PESB.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Educational interpreters do not currently interpret everything that is said in class. The students that need this interpretation do not always know what is going on in class because not everything is interpreted. The education system has been broken for deaf people for many years. One of the reasons for this is because of the lack of qualifications for educational interpreters. They may know a few signs, but they cannot interpret properly. They must learn the language. It is hard to imagine what it would be like to go to school and not know what is going on. Students who are deaf and hearing impaired rely heavily on interpretation and the quality of interpreters. There is a lack of quality educational interpreters. Without quick action to address this issue, more deaf and hearing impaired students will be marginally employable. This is a sentence to a life on public assistance. Deaf and hearing impaired people do not want to be underemployed. The lack of appropriate employment options is a result of lacking quality interpreters. Without quality interpreters, these students are exposed to an impoverished language experience. Many of these people end up needing mental health services, which has to undo the damage the education system has done.

(With concerns) For an employee making around \$13 an hour, funding the assessments themselves will be a great burden. Generally, if employees go back to school, they get higher pay. For these reasons, there will be a cost to school districts. If the state is setting standards, they should step up and pay. Community colleges rarely offer the courses needed to provide educational interpretation. Employees cannot find the training necessary to become qualified. It will also be a challenge for employees to afford the training.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Dahlquist, prime sponsor; Ammon Morrill; Allie Joiner; Larry Peterson; and David Brenna, Professional Educator Standards Board.

(With concerns) Doug Nelson, Public School Employees of Washington; and Lucinda Young, Washington Education Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill by Committee on Education be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Fagan, Ranking Minority Member; Carlyle, Dahlquist, Haler, Maxwell, Pettigrew, Seaquist, Sullivan and Wilcox.

Staff: Jessica Harrell (786-7349).

Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Appropriations Subcommittee on Education Compared to Recommendation of Committee On Education:

No new changes were recommended.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) It is imperative to have certified interpreters to make sure that the same educational opportunities are provided to both hearing and nonhearing children alike. The use of unqualified interpreters results in additional educational needs for nonhearing students, often as many as two or even three more years of school to bring them up to standards. Uncertified interpreters are not held to any type of performance standard, making it impossible to evaluate the quality of the service that they are providing. Requiring certification for interpreters ensures that state dollars are being spent wisely when they are spent on interpreter services. Additionally, the certification requirement puts sign language interpreters on par with spoken language interpreters who are currently required to meet specific certification requirements.

(With concerns) This bill moves the state from having no standards for interpreters to having the highest standards in the nation. The cost to make this change is approximately \$2 million to \$3 million. The lowest paid employees in the system would be required to pay these costs. Standards should exist, but the cost should not be paid by the lowest paid employees in the school system. In addition to the dollar cost, for some interpreters there are time and access issues for getting the required training to meet the standards. The bill should be expanded to include the SEE (Signed Exact English) program as an option for pursuing the training necessary to meet the certification requirements.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Dahlquist, prime sponsor; Milena Calderari Waldron; James Christianson, Washington State Association of the Deaf; Larry Petersen; and Leroy Mould, Interpreters United Local 1671.

(With concerns) Doug Nelson, Public Service Employees-Service Employees International Union.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.