

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6415

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to the appointment of interpreters for driver's license examinations.

Brief Description: Allowing interpreters to assist hearing impaired persons during driver's license examinations.

Sponsors: Senators Pridemore, McAuliffe, Mulliken and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/21/06, 2/23/06 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Allows a deaf or hearing impaired driver's license applicant to be accompanied during the skills test, at the Department of Licensing's (DOL) expense, by an interpreter chosen by the applicant from a list provided by the DOL.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Murray, Chair; Wallace, Vice Chair; Woods, Ranking Minority Member; Skinner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Buck, Clibborn, Curtis, Dickerson, Ericksen, Flannigan, Hankins, Holmquist, Hudgins, Jarrett, Kilmer, Lovick, Morris, Nixon, Rodne, Schindler, Sells, Shabro, Simpson, B. Sullivan, Takko, Upthegrove and Wood.

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

Background:

There are three tests that an applicant must pass in order to obtain a driver's license: a vision exam, a knowledge exam, and a skills exam. The Department of Licensing (DOL) may adopt rules relating to driver testing procedures.

The DOL policy, during the knowledge exam, is to hire a deaf interpreter for those applicants who think they would benefit from it. The interpreter may only assist the applicant in understanding the exam questions and choice of answers. Family members or friends may not be used as the interpreter.

In the skills exam, the DOL policy is to set aside additional time for the exam and to meet with the applicant before the exam to discuss preferred modes of communication. An interpreter is not allowed in the car during the skills exam.

Summary of Amended Bill:

If a driver's license applicant is deaf or hearing impaired, the DOL is required to allow an interpreter in the car during the skills exam. The interpreter must be of the applicant's choosing from a list provided by the DOL, and at the DOL's expense.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amended bill requires the applicant to choose an interpreter from a list provided by the DOL, rather than allowing the applicant to choose anyone to serve as an interpreter. The amended bill also requires the DOL to pay for the cost of the interpreter rather than the applicant.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: A driver's license exam is a daunting experience for anyone. It is even more daunting when it is taken in a foreign language. The various forms of sign language have very different grammatical structures than written and spoken English. A deaf or hearing impaired applicant is thus already forced to use a foreign language on the written portion of the driver's exam, and providing them with interpreters during the skills portion of the exam resolves that problem in that context. In the past, the deaf and hearing impaired were often prevented from using sign language. The state should not be doing so today.

Interpreters do not assist, cheat or coax an applicant, and assuming that they do so is insulting. Interpreters are already used in driver's training schools. The use of interpreters during a skills test is not nearly as dangerous as using flash cards or passing notes.

A requirement that a deaf or hearing impaired applicant pay for the cost of their interpreter is likely a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Pridemore, prime sponsor; Ashli-Marie Grant (through an interpreter); and Toby Olson, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.