

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 6606

As Reported by House Committee On: Education

Title: An act relating to standards for educational interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Brief Description: Requiring standards for educational interpreters for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Oke, Fairley, Deccio, Berkey, McAuliffe, Keiser, Kline, Regala, Honeyford, Thibaudeau, Mulliken, Pridemore, Rockefeller, Delvin, Rasmussen and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/20/06, 2/22/06 [DP].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to develop standards for educational interpreters for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.
- Requires the SPI to convene an advisory committee to assist in developing the standards.
- Requires the SPI to report and make recommendations to the Education Committees of the Legislature regarding the standards developed, and to receive formal legislative approval of the standards before implementing the standards.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; P. Sullivan, Vice Chair; Talcott, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Haigh, Hunter, McDermott, Priest, Santos, Shabro, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Sarah Ream (786-7303).

Background:

Under federal and state law, school districts must provide a free and appropriate education to children, who due to a disability, need special education and related services. "Special education" means specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. "Related services" includes supportive services that help the child benefit from special education. In some circumstances, this means that school districts must provide educational sign language/oral interpreters for deaf or hard-of-hearing students. According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, there are approximately 1,400 deaf or hard-of-hearing students currently enrolled in Washington's public K-12 schools.

Currently, Washington law does not require that educational interpreters be certified or meet standardized qualifications or competencies. The National Association of the Deaf and the Registry for Interpreters for the Deaf offer a national certification that may be obtained on a voluntary basis; however, such certification is not required for Washington educational interpreters. Likewise, the Washington Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing maintains a registry of interpreters, but registration as an interpreter is not required for a person to work as an educational interpreter.

Many colleges and universities provide some courses in American Sign Language. However, there are only four programs in Washington that provide a comprehensive sign language interpreter training program. These are: Seattle Central Community College, Spokane Falls Community College, Wenatchee Valley Community College, and the American Sign Language and Interpreting School of Seattle. Wenatchee Valley Community College is the only school in Washington with a program specifically designed to train educational sign language interpreters.

Summary of Bill:

To the extent funds are appropriated, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) must develop standards for educational interpreters for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. These standards must focus on the specific skills and knowledge necessary to serve the communication needs of students.

In developing the standards, the SPI must convene an advisory committee of representatives of nationally certificated educational interpreters, tactile interpreters, interpreter educators, school district coordinators of deaf programs, leaders in the deaf community, and parents of deaf children.

The SPI must report to the Legislature's Education Committees and recommend an implementation schedule of the standards developed by the SPI. The SPI must obtain formal legislative approval before implementing any standards for educational interpreters.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill is long over due. Without qualified interpreters, deaf and hard-of-hearing students cannot fully access what is going on in the school environment. Washington has no standards for educational interpreters, however, interpreters are key to students' success. If the interpreter is lousy, the student will get a lousy education, regardless of the quality of the student's teacher. Non-certified interpreters are often under-qualified and overwhelmed when trying to interpret in a school setting. Without certified interpreters in schools, there will be more deaf adults who are unemployed or under-employed.

This is a problem nationwide and many states are considering adopting standards for educational interpreters. Utah recently passed a law requiring educational interpreters to be certified. Utah lost a lot of interpreters at first, but then more than doubled their number of interpreters in the next few years.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Carol Carrothers and Terri Thurston, Washington Sensory Disabilities Services; and Larry Petersen, Washington State Registry of Interpreters and the Washington State Association of the Deaf.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.