

~~WHEREAS, Maryland is committed to providing pertinent education programs for deaf and hearing impaired students that include American Sign Language rich environments with educational professionals proficient in American Sign Language and with an American Sign Language peer group; and~~

WHEREAS, Current linguistic research indicates early acquisition and fluency in American Sign Language for deaf and ~~hearing impaired~~ hard of hearing children enhances their mastery of English and dramatically improves their literacy skills; and

WHEREAS, Thirty state legislatures have supported the rights of deaf and ~~hearing impaired~~ hard of hearing citizens and adopted legislation recognizing American Sign Language as a language, now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read, as follows:

Article 30 - Deaf, Mute or Blind

31.

(A) Whenever in this article or in any other laws of this State reference shall be made to the term, "deaf, dumb and blind", the same shall hereafter be taken to mean "deaf, mute or blind".

(B) "DEAF" MEANS PERMANENT HEARING LOSS:

(1) THAT IS SEVERE ENOUGH TO NECESSITATE THE USE OF AMPLIFICATION DEVICES TO HEAR ORAL COMMUNICATION; OR

(2) THAT IS SO SEVERE THAT AMPLIFICATION DEVICES ARE INEFFECTIVE.

34.

(A) IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF OR ~~HEARING IMPAIRED~~ HARD OF HEARING ARE IDENTIFIED AS A CULTURAL MINORITY WITH SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATION NEEDS.

(B) AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE IS RECOGNIZED AS A LANGUAGE SYSTEM DESIGNED TO MEET THE SPECIALIZED COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF THE DEAF AND ~~HEARING IMPAIRED~~ HARD OF HEARING. AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE IS A VISUAL-SPATIAL METHOD OF COMMUNICATION THAT IS A SEPARATE AND DISTINCT LANGUAGE INVOLVING THE HANDS, ARMS, FACIAL MARKERS, AND BODY MOVEMENTS TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS, INCLUDING THE CONVEYANCE OF THOUGHTS, WORDS, EMOTIONS, AND GRAMMATICAL INFORMATION.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2001.

Approved May 15, 2001.