

WHEREAS, Of those native English speakers who study the most difficult, high-interest languages, few reach the federal standard for "limited proficiency level," with only 9% attaining limited proficiency in listening, 11% in speaking, and 35% in reading, and many fewer ever become proficient at the federal "professional" standard; and

WHEREAS, Maryland's heritage language speakers, descendants of immigrants to Maryland, who are raised in homes in which foreign languages are spoken but are educated in English, comprise a valuable and vastly underutilized linguistic resource for the United States; and

WHEREAS, According to figures from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey of 2005, more than 735,000 individuals in Maryland who are at least 6 years old, or nearly 14.5% of the State's population, speak foreign languages at home; and

WHEREAS, Students in Maryland public school systems speak at least 150 different languages; and

WHEREAS, Among the State's heritage language speakers, many are fluent in languages of high interest for national security, defense, business, and trade industries, including more than 12,000 speakers of Persian, nearly 9,000 speakers of Urdu, more than 8,000 speakers of Arabic, nearly 49,000 speakers of Chinese, nearly 34,000 speakers of Korean, nearly 15,000 speakers of Hindi, and more than 19,000 speakers of Russian; and

WHEREAS, Such valuable heritage language skills tend to diminish rapidly as individuals and families are assimilated; and

WHEREAS, The speakers of heritage languages ought to be encouraged and assisted in maintaining, developing, and improving their native language abilities while improving their English skills; and

WHEREAS, Because the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2008 the International Year of Languages, promoting diversity and international understanding worldwide, it is a particularly good time to make full use of the many and varied language resources in our State; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That:

(a) There is a Task Force on the Preservation of Heritage Language Skills in Maryland.