

An Act Relative to the Training, Assessment, and Assignment of Qualified School Interpreters in Educational Settings **HB 552 (Rep. Cabral) SB 303 (Sen. Crighton)**

- This legislation directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to increase access to qualified school interpreters, by developing a system for training, assessing, and determining qualifications of interpreters in educational settings. The bill authorizes DESE to adopt regulations that are needed to administer the system and implementation of the bill would be phased in, subject to appropriation.
- This bill incorporates the recommendations of DESE's School Interpreter Task Force formed pursuant to section 81 of chapter 154 of the acts of 2018. The Interpreter Task Force, including school district administrators, educators, parent advocates, and an interpreter training program director, voted unanimously to approve recommendations for implementing a tiered system to train and assign school interpreters.
- Nearly 30% of students across the Commonwealth come from families whose first language is not English.¹ Despite well-established federal and state legal requirements to provide competent interpreters, families throughout the Commonwealth continue to face significant language access barriers.
- Many school districts rely on untrained employees or volunteers who are often unqualified as interpreters and unprepared to effectively interpret information vital to a child's growth and development. These staff are often unfamiliar with the terminology being used and may not be fluent in both languages, yet they are asked to interpret for meetings regarding expulsion, special education, and other important matters. As a result, too many parents are provided inaccurate information, and are unable to participate meaningfully in their child's education and access equal education opportunities for their children.
- This bill will help districts implement language access requirements of federal and state law. The US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has stated that schools must: *"provide language assistance to LEP parents effectively with appropriate, competent staff... It is not sufficient for the staff merely to be bilingual."*² OCR has further clarified that individuals acting as interpreters must be trained in interpreter ethics, confidentiality, and have knowledge of specialized terms and concepts in both languages. Massachusetts DESE has also issued guidance echoing these principles.³

¹ 2020-21 data from MA DESE enrollment by special populations report. Found at:
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/enroll/default.html?yr=2021>

² Letter from U.S. Dep't of Justice and U.S. Dep't of Educ. on English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents to Sch. Educ. Agencies, Sch. Dist., and All Pub. Sch. (Jan. 7, 2015). p. 38

³ *Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement and Reclassification of English Learners*, MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, November 2016, p 102.