

§§1,2
C.30:6-16.1
and 30:6-16.2
§3
Note to §1
§4
Approp. and
Note to §1

P.L. 2025, CHAPTER 257, *approved January 12, 2026*
Assembly, No. 4986 (*Second Reprint*)

1 AN ACT concerning deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind children and
2 supplementing Title ¹**[30]** ²**[26¹]** 30² of the Revised Statutes.
3
4
5 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
6 *of New Jersey:*
7
8 ²**[1.a.** There is established in the ¹**[Division of the Deaf and**
9 **Hard of Hearing in the]** Department of ¹**[Human Services an]**
10 Health, in conjunction with the Department of Education and the
11 Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf, the Early Language
12 Access Program. The program shall provide¹ early language
13 instruction ¹**[program]** to support the language acquisition and
14 developmental needs of deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind
15 children aged five and younger and their families. ¹To the extent
16 applicable under federal or State law and regulation, services
17 provided under the program for children up to the age of three shall
18 be delivered under the department’s Early Intervention Program,
19 established pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1993, c.309 (C.26:1A-
20 36.7).¹ All services delivered under this program shall be free of
21 charge ¹, except when cost sharing requirements imposed under the
22 Early Intervention Program apply¹.
23 b. At a minimum, under the program, the ¹**[division]**
24 department¹ shall match each eligible child and eligible child’s
25 family with ¹instruction and support services provided by
26 appropriate members of an interprofessional team, which may
27 include, but not be limited to:¹ an American Sign Language Deaf
28 Language Associate ¹**[to]** ; a licensed speech-language-pathologist;
29 a licensed audiologist; a certified teacher of the visually impaired; a
30 certified teacher of the deaf; a licensed occupational therapist; or a
31 licensed social worker. These professionals shall¹ provide the child
32 and family with instruction and support services up to 25 hours a

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets **[thus]** in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.
Matter underlined thus is new matter.
Matter enclosed in superscript numerals has been adopted as follows:
¹Senate SHH committee amendments adopted June 9, 2025.
²Senate floor amendments adopted December 22, 2025.

1 week. The ¹**["division"] department**¹ shall make available language instruction services ¹, which shall include services that follow an established curriculum tailored to the child's and family's preferred communication mode, including, but not limited to, American Sign Language, spoken language with auditory support, and multimodal approaches.¹ in all applicable settings where the eligible child participates in daily activities, including childcare centers, preschool programs, summer camps, and in the child's home. The ¹**["division"] department**¹ shall provide additional services under the program, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child and the eligible child's family, including ¹,¹ but not limited to: ¹consultation with licensed audiologists and speech-language pathologists to ensure comprehensive, evidence-based services aligned with the child's individualized needs;¹ information and referral services to other State and non-State resources; case management services provided by ¹**["an individual fluent in American Sign Language"]** a designated professional, who can provide services consistent with the family's preferred method of communication including American Sign Language, spoken language, or augmentative and alternative communication¹ ; assistance in locating and coordinating a qualified interpreter or real-time caption provider; resources for obtaining hearing aids and other equipment to support the needs of the eligible child ¹, including bone-anchored hearing devices and cochlear implants, access to audiological evaluations, hearing technology maintenance and aural rehabilitation services provided by licensed audiologists, and augmentative and alternative communication evaluations¹ ; and the provision of sensitivity training to the eligible child's health care providers, education or day care providers, or other applicable supports on awareness of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing children and adults.

32 c. In order to be determined eligible to receive services under
33 the program, an eligible child's family shall provide proof of the
34 child's hearing loss, age, and New Jersey residency to the
35 ¹**["division"] department**¹.

36 d. As used in this section:

37 "American Sign Language Deaf Language Associate" means a
38 deaf adult with experience working with babies, toddlers, and
39 children who has advanced proficiency skills to provide a fluent
40 American Sign Language model for an eligible child and eligible
41 child's family.

42 ¹**["Division"] "Department"**¹ means the ¹**["Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the"]** Department of ¹**["Human Services"] Health**¹.

45 "Program" means the early language instruction program
46 established under this section to support the language acquisition

1 and developmental needs of deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind
2 children aged five and younger and their families. ²]

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4 ²1. a. There is established in the Department of Human Services
5 the Language Instruction Program. The program shall provide early
6 language instruction to support the language acquisition and
7 developmental needs of deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind children
8 aged five and younger and their families. All services delivered under
9 this program shall be free of charge.

10 b. At a minimum, under the program, the department shall match
11 each eligible child and eligible child's family with an American Sign
12 Language Deaf Language Associate to provide the child and family
13 with instruction and support services up to 25 hours a week. The
14 department shall ensure that all American Sign Language Deaf
15 Language Associates assigned to the program complete specified
16 training and adhere to curriculum requirements as determined by the
17 department. The department shall make available language instruction
18 services that follow an established curriculum tailored to American
19 Sign Language in all applicable settings where the eligible child
20 participates in daily activities, including childcare centers, preschool
21 programs, summer camps, and in the child's home. The department
22 shall provide additional services under the program, as appropriate to
23 the needs of an eligible child and the eligible child's family, including,
24 but not limited to: information and referral services to other State and
25 non-State resources including, but not limited to, services offered by
26 the Early Intervention System in the Department of Health; case
27 management services provided by an individual fluent in American
28 Sign Language; assistance in locating and coordinating a qualified
29 interpreter or real-time caption provider; resources for obtaining
30 hearing aids and other equipment to support the needs of the eligible
31 child, including bone-anchored hearing devices and cochlear implants,
32 access to audiological evaluations, hearing technology maintenance
33 and aural rehabilitation services provided by licensed audiologists, and
34 augmentative and alternative communication evaluations; and the
35 provision of sensitivity training to the eligible child's health care
36 providers, education or day care providers, or other applicable
37 supports on awareness of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing
38 children and adults.

39 c. In order to be determined eligible to receive services under the
40 program, an eligible child's family shall provide proof of the child's
41 hearing loss, age, and New Jersey residency to the department.

42 d. As used in this section:

43 "American Sign Language Deaf Language Associate" means a
44 deaf adult with experience working with babies, toddlers, and children
45 who has advanced proficiency skills to provide a fluent American Sign
46 Language model for an eligible child and eligible child's family.

47 "Department" means the Department of Human Services.

1 “Program” means the language instruction program established
2 under this section to support the language acquisition and
3 developmental needs of deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind children
4 aged five and younger and their families.²

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6 ²2. The Department shall issue a report annually to the Governor
7 and the Legislature, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-
8 19.1), regarding the implementation and impact of the program
9 established pursuant to section 1 of this act.²

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11 ²[2.] ^{3.}² Pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act,"
12 P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), the ¹[Executive Director of the
13 Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Department of Human
14 Services] Commissioner of ²[Health¹] Human Services² shall adopt
15 rules and regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this act.

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17 ²4. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the
18 Department of Human Services such funds as are necessary to
19 effectuate the provisions of this act.²

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21 ²[3.] ^{5.}² This act shall take effect ²[on the 90th day following
22 enactment, but the ¹[Executive Director of the Division of the Deaf
23 and Hard of Hearing in the Department of Human Services]
24 Commissioner of Health¹ may take such anticipatory administrative
25 action in advance as shall be necessary for implementation of the act]
26 immediately² .

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31 Codifies early language instruction program for deaf, hard of
32 hearing, and deaf-blind children in DHS.