

CHAPTER 257

AN ACT concerning deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind children and supplementing Title 30 of the Revised Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.30:6-16.1 Language Instruction Program.

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

b. At a minimum, under the program, the department shall match each eligible child and eligible child's family with an American Sign Language Deaf Language Associate to provide the child and family with instruction and support services up to 25 hours a week. The department shall ensure that all American Sign Language Deaf Language Associates assigned to the program complete specified training and adhere to curriculum requirements as determined by the department. The department shall make available language instruction services that follow an established curriculum tailored to American Sign Language 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 department shall provide additional services under the program, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child and the eligible child's family, including, but not limited to: information and referral services to other State and non-State resources including, but not limited to, services offered by the Early Intervention System in the Department of Health; case management services provided by an individual fluent in American Sign Language; 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, 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 evaluations; 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.

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

d. As used in this section:

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

"Department" means the Department of Human Services.

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

C.30:6-16.2 Annual report.

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

3. Pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), the Commissioner of Human Services shall adopt rules and regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this act.

4. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Human Services such funds as are necessary to effectuate the provisions of this act.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 12, 2026.