



MONTANA LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

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Director
AMY CARLSON

DATE: December 13, 2023
TO: Education Interim Budget Committee
FROM: Mark Yakubovich, LFD
RE: MSDB Interpreter Staffing Update

INTERPRETER STAFFING

The Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) has been experiencing significant levels of vacancies within their interpreter staff and is reporting negative impacts to students as a result. The MSDB budget includes funding for a total of nine interpreters, with three of those positions or 33.3% of the interpreter staff vacant as of the date of this memo.

MSDB currently has five interpreters at 0.71 FTE (including one supervisor) and one interpreter at 0.50 FTE that are filled. Out of the five interpreters at 0.71 FTE, four are eligible for retirement.

There are two vacant interpreter positions at 0.71 FTE and one vacant interpreter position at 0.44 FTE. All vacant positions are being advertised and MSDB has offered an apartment in their cottage program to help assist with living expenses. Three out of the last four hires were from out-of-state (Alaska, Florida, Arizona), but only one is still on staff. MSDB is working with Chicago University and Augustana College in South Dakota to allow interns to work with MSDB and live in their cottages. The goal is to recruit interpreters from the pool of interns for permanent positions with MSDB.

Since September 30, 2023, no applications for the advertised interpreter positions have been received. MSDB reports seeing an impact to students regarding vacant interpreter positions. Due to the limited number of interpreters on staff, the interpreters are unable to work in pairs, which would allow the interpreters to switch every 15 minutes to alleviate the mental and physical strain from translating English into American Sign Language and vice versa. According to MSDB, this is causing the interpreters to feel burnt out and unable to help with extracurricular programs. Additionally, due to high vacancies and staff turnover the interpreter supervisor has been increasingly focused on training and mentoring entry-level staff and unable to assist in relieving some of the workload for the other interpreters, causing MSDB to lose their two most recent hires.