

HB 530 -- AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

SPONSOR: Moore

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Committee on Higher Education by a vote of 9 to 0.

This bill treats American Sign Language (ASL) as a foreign language for the granting of academic credit at public schools and public higher education institutions. Students may receive academic credit for demonstrating proficiency or completing a course with a passing grade. The credit may be used to satisfy the foreign language or language arts requirements, including entrance requirements of public higher education institutions. Nothing in the bill prohibits a department of a higher education institution from establishing specific language requirements for its majors that cannot be met by ASL, nor does the bill prohibit the offering of noncredit courses in ASL. The Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Missouri American Sign Language Teachers Association, upon request, will assist in the development and teaching of the courses.

FISCAL NOTE: No impact on state funds in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill will help overcome barriers not only for the deaf and hard of hearing, but also for hearing persons. Hearing parents of deaf children, people who lose their hearing or their ability to speak later in life, and emergency personnel will benefit from the additional number of people who will be encouraged to learn ASL or to complete the training to be an interpreter.

Testifying for the bill were Representatives Moore and Page; Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Kim Davis; St. Louis Community College-Florissant Valley; LEAD Institute; Antonina Wilson; Missouri American Sign Language Teachers Association; William Bixby Sheldon; Jeff Blasek; Barbara Garrison; Shauna Morgan; Paul Blicharz; Karin Sack; Rene Powell; and Michael Boyd.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

Becky DeNeve, Senior Legislative Analyst