

CHAPTER 412

(House Bill 610)

AN ACT concerning

Task Force on the Preservation of Heritage Language Skills in Maryland

FOR the purpose of establishing a Task Force on the Preservation of Heritage Language Skills in Maryland; providing for the membership and duties of the Task Force; ~~requiring the election~~ providing for the selection of a chair of the Task Force; requiring the State Department of Education to provide staff for the Task Force; prohibiting members of the Task Force from receiving certain compensation; authorizing a member to receive certain reimbursement; requiring the Task Force to report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before a certain date; providing for the termination of this Act; requiring the Task Force to continue to advise the Governor and the General Assembly on certain matters until a certain time; and generally relating to the Task Force on the Preservation of Heritage Language Skills in Maryland.

Preamble

WHEREAS, While it is important for new Americans to learn and master English, there is also a critical shortage of Americans proficient in languages other than English; and

WHEREAS, The need for world language skills is increasingly important in national security, defense, education, and in maintaining a competitive edge in business and trade; and

WHEREAS, The language fluency level required for success in national security and in a global economy often far exceeds that previously considered sufficient; and

WHEREAS, Native English speakers in traditional American academic programs generally do not study foreign languages for extensive periods; and

WHEREAS, Of those native English speakers who study the most difficult, high-interest languages, few reach the federal standard for “limited proficiency level,” with only 9% attaining limited proficiency in listening, 11% in speaking, and 35% in reading, and many fewer ever become proficient at the federal “professional” standard; and

WHEREAS, Maryland’s heritage language speakers, descendants of immigrants to Maryland, who are raised in homes in which foreign languages are spoken but are

educated in English, comprise a valuable and vastly underutilized linguistic resource for the United States; and

WHEREAS, According to figures from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey of 2005, more than 735,000 individuals in Maryland who are at least 6 years old, or nearly 14.5% of the State's population, speak foreign languages at home; and

WHEREAS, Students in Maryland public school systems speak at least 150 different languages; and

WHEREAS, Among the State's heritage language speakers, many are fluent in languages of high interest for national security, defense, business, and trade industries, including more than 12,000 speakers of Persian, nearly 9,000 speakers of Urdu, more than 8,000 speakers of Arabic, nearly 49,000 speakers of Chinese, nearly 34,000 speakers of Korean, nearly 15,000 speakers of Hindi, and more than 19,000 speakers of Russian; and

WHEREAS, Such valuable heritage language skills tend to diminish rapidly as individuals and families are assimilated; and

WHEREAS, The speakers of heritage languages ought to be encouraged and assisted in maintaining, developing, and improving their native language abilities while improving their English skills; and

WHEREAS, Because the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2008 the International Year of Languages, promoting diversity and international understanding worldwide, it is a particularly good time to make full use of the many and varied language resources in our State; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That:

(a) There is a Task Force on the Preservation of Heritage Language Skills in Maryland.

(b) The Task Force consists of the following members:

(1) one member of the Senate of Maryland, appointed by the President of the Senate;

(2) one member of the House of Delegates, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

(3) the Secretary of Business and Economic Development, or the Secretary's designee;

- (4) the Secretary of Education, or the Secretary's designee;
- (5) the Secretary of Human Resources, or the Secretary's designee;
- (6) the Secretary of the Maryland Higher Education Commission, or the Secretary's designee;
- (7) the Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, or the Executive Director's designee;

~~(7)~~ (8) the following eight members, appointed by the Secretary of Education:

(i) four members from the business community, including representatives of the Fort Meade Alliance and the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, or similar organizations; and

(ii) four members who are familiar with heritage language programs and who are members of ethnic community groups; ~~and~~

~~(8)~~ (9) the following three members as representatives of the University System of Maryland:

(i) one representative of the National Foreign Language Center; and

(ii) two other members to be designated by the Chancellor of the University System of Maryland; and

(10) one member who is a representative of Maryland community colleges, appointed by the Maryland Association of Community Colleges.

~~(e) The Task Force shall elect a chair from among its members.~~

(c) The President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House shall jointly select the chair of the Task Force from among its members.

(d) The State Department of Education shall provide staff for the Task Force.

(e) A member of the Task Force:

(1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Task Force; but

(2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations, as provided in the State budget.

- (f) The Task Force shall:
- (1) study methods of advancing and preserving heritage language skills in Maryland;
 - (2) consult with educators and other experts in the field of world language training and development;
 - (3) review and identify the best practices of heritage language programs that are being or will be conducted by government, schools, community groups, religious groups, and ethnic groups in the State, across the U.S., and internationally;
 - (4) compile data on the number of actual and potential heritage language speakers in Maryland;
 - (5) develop a process to identify priority heritage languages that is flexible enough to meet current and future national security and international business requirements;
 - (6) consider new, cost-effective, and innovative ways to encourage and facilitate heritage language learning while also encouraging new citizens of the U.S. to learn and master English; and
 - (7) recommend actions and programs that ensure maximum preservation of heritage language skills and identify measures of success for each.
- (g) On or before January 1, 2009, the Task Force shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly.
- (h) The Task Force shall continue to advise the Governor and the General Assembly on the implementation of its recommendations until this Act is abrogated and of no further force and effect.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July 1, 2008. It shall remain effective for a period of 1 year and 1 month and, at the end of July 31, 2009, with no further action required by the General Assembly, this Act shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

Approved by the Governor, May 13, 2008.