• This legislation directs the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to create standards and competencies for the training, hiring and use of interpreters in educational settings in order to provide limited English proficient (LEP) parents and students with competent interpretation services, as required by federal and state law.

• The legislation concerns the issues addressed by the School Interpreter Task Force formed pursuant to Outside Section 81 of the FY19 state budget. The DESE-led Task Force was charged with studying and developing recommendations for the legislature regarding the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to serve as an interpreter in school settings. Task Force membership included school district administrators, educators, parent advocates, and a UMASS Amherst interpreter training program director. It is expected that amendments to the bill will be considered in light of the unanimous recommendations recently provided by the Task Force.

• 20% of students across the Commonwealth come from families whose native language is not English.¹ Despite well-established federal and state legal requirements to provide competent interpreters, families throughout the Commonwealth continue to face significant language access barriers.

• In 2016, 113 school districts in Massachusetts were found by DESE Coordinated Program Review to be in need of corrective action when it came to their provision of competent interpretation and translation services to parents who are limited English proficient.

• Many school districts rely on untrained employees or volunteers who are often unqualified as interpreters and unprepared to adequately interpret information vital to a child’s growth and development. These staff are often unfamiliar with the terminology being used and may not be fluent in both languages, yet they are asked to interpret for meetings regarding expulsion, special education, and other important matters.

• As a result, too many parents are provided inaccurate information, are unable to participate meaningfully in their child’s education, and are unable to access equal education opportunities for their children. Meaningful language access is one of the greatest challenges faced by LEP families.

• The US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has stated that schools must: “provide language assistance to LEP parents effectively with appropriate, competent staff… It is not sufficient for the staff merely to be bilingual.” ² OCR has further clarified that individuals acting as interpreters must be trained in interpreter ethics, confidentiality, and have knowledge of specialized terms and concepts in both languages. Massachusetts DESE has also issued guidance echoing these principals.³

• Implementation of the bill would be phased in. The School Interpreter Task Force recommends a 6-year phase in for each school district.

¹ 2017-18 data from MA DESE state reports. Found at: http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/selectedpopulations.aspx