SENATE, No. 1363

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

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Sponsored by:
Senator SHIRLEY K. TURNER
District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes task force to study issues and make recommendations regarding Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

AN ACT establishing a Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf Task Force.

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

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. Schools for the deaf across the country have contributed to the education of students who are deaf and hard of hearing for nearly 200 years.

b. Many of these schools have undergone changes in recent years, including shifts in enrollment patterns, governance structure, and the scope of services provided. Factors such as advances in technology, state-level fiscal constraints, and a continued need to maintain a visual learning environment for students who use sign language to communicate have led to new, innovative programs in many states that are both cost-effective and more academically rigorous.

c. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing continue to benefit from an educational environment where classmates, teachers, and staff members who use sign language to communicate are the norm, rather than the exception.

d. Language development is the key to learning, and opportunities for language development are maximized in an educational environment where all students can engage in rich conversations with peers, teachers, and administrators throughout the school day. Schools for the deaf, where students and staff communicate through sign language, provide that crucial environment for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

e. The Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf, with roots dating back to 1832, provides that necessary environment in New Jersey, offering comprehensive educational services for deaf and hard of hearing students from birth to age 21.

f. In recent years, the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf has faced several challenges, such as declining enrollment, rising costs for maintaining the school's buildings and grounds, overall fiscal issues, and instructional challenges. These concerns warrant further study that includes taking a broad view of the school to determine how the State can best meet the educational needs of its students who are deaf and hard of hearing in an effective and fiscally responsible manner.

2. a. There is established a Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf Task Force. The purpose of the task force is to study current issues concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf, identify areas for improvement, and make recommendations to the Department of Education that will enable the school to

achieve its goal of preparing students who are deaf or hard of hearing for a postsecondary education or career upon graduation.

b. The task force shall consist of the following 21 members:

(1) the Commissioner of Education, or a designee, who shall serve ex officio;

(2) the Director of the Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, or a designee;

(3) two members appointed by the President of the Senate, one of whom is a student who attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf and one of whom is a parent of a student who attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf;

(4) two members appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, one of whom is a student who attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf and one of whom is a parent of a student who attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; and

(5) 15 members appointed by the Governor, who shall include: one representative of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority; two representatives of the New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; two representatives of the New Jersey Association of the Deaf; the current superintendent of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; a former superintendent of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two alumni of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two representatives of Leadership and Excellence in Education for the Deaf (LEED); two recognized experts in the area of deaf education, both of whom are residents of New Jersey and are deaf; and two representatives of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf's Citizen Advisory Board.

c. Appointments to the task force shall be made within 30 days of the effective date of this act. Vacancies in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments were made. Members of the task force shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary expenditures incurred in the performance of their duties as members of the task force within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the task force for its purposes.

3. The task force shall organize as soon as practicable following the appointment of its members, but no later than 60 days after the effective date of this act. The task force shall choose a chairperson from among its members and shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the task force.

4. The Department of Education shall provide such stenographic, clerical, and other administrative assistants, and such professional staff as the task force requires to carry out its work. The task force also shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail

itself of the services of the employees of any State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it may require and as may be available for its purposes.

5. It shall be the duty of the task force to study and analyze current issues concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf, to identify areas for improvement, and to make recommendations concerning the future direction of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf that will enable the school to achieve its goal of preparing students who are deaf or hard of hearing for a postsecondary education or career upon graduation. The duties of the task force shall include, but need not be limited to:

a. reviewing facility conditions to identify repairs, modifications, and improvements to the school that are necessary to meet the educational and residential needs of the students;

b. identifying barriers, including any instructional challenges, that prevent the school from best achieving its goals, and identifying strategies to remove those barriers;

c. studying the demographics of the population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in New Jersey, making projections regarding this population over the next 10 years, and generating strategies to increase enrollment at the school and better serve this population;

d. evaluating the current scope of programs and services provided by the school and in the State for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and assessing what additional programs and services are needed to improve educational opportunities for these students;

e. evaluating the current governance structure of the school and considering what type of governance system would best address current operating issues and provide support for the long-term viability of the school;

f. identifying and reviewing other successful public or private schools for the deaf nationwide, and drawing ideas for improvement to the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf from these models; and

g. developing a set of recommendations for the school regarding: an efficient and flexible system of school governance; programs and services that incorporate next generation methods of instruction and technology; state-of-the-art facilities that will best meet the needs of the students; and expanded Statewide services to meet the needs of a broader spectrum of deaf and hard of hearing children and youth, their families, and the New Jersey deaf community.

6. The task force shall issue a final report to the Governor, the State Board of Education, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), no later than six months after

the task force organizes. The report shall contain the task force's findings and recommendations concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf.

7. This act shall take effect immediately, and the task force shall expire 30 days after the issuance of its final report.

STATEMENT

This bill establishes a 21-member task force to study issues and make recommendations related to the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf in New Jersey. The task force will study current issues concerning the school, identify areas for improvement, and make recommendations concerning the future direction of the school that will enable the school to achieve its goal of preparing students who are deaf or hard of hearing for a postsecondary education or career upon graduation.

The task force will be comprised of: the Commissioner of Education; the Director of the Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs; two members appointed by the Senate President, including one student and one parent of a student who attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two members appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, including one student and one parent of a student who attends the school; and 15 members appointed by the Governor. The Governor's appointees will include one representative of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority; two representatives of the New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; two representatives of the New Jersey Association of the Deaf; the current superintendent of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; a former superintendent of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two alumni of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two representatives of Leadership and Excellence in Education for the Deaf (LEED); two recognized experts in the area of deaf education, both of whom are residents of New Jersey and are deaf; and two representatives of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf's Citizen Advisory Board.

Under the bill, the duties of the task force will include, but need not be limited to:

- reviewing facility conditions to identify repairs, modifications, and improvements to the school that are necessary to meet the educational and residential needs of the students;
- identifying barriers, including any instructional challenges, that prevent the school from best achieving its goals, and identifying strategies to remove those barriers;

- studying the demographics of the population of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in New Jersey, making projections regarding this population over the next 10 years, and generating strategies to increase enrollment at the school and better serve this population;
- evaluating the current scope of programs and services provided by the school and in the State for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and assessing what additional programs and services are needed to improve educational opportunities for these students;
- evaluating the current governance structure of the school and considering what type of governance system would best address current operating issues and provide support for the long-term viability of the school;
- identifying and reviewing other successful public or private schools for the deaf nationwide, and drawing ideas for improvement to the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf from these models; and
- developing a set of recommendations for the school regarding: an efficient and flexible system of school governance; programs and services that incorporate next generation methods of instruction and technology; state-of-the-art facilities that will best meet the needs of the students; and expanded Statewide services to meet the needs of a broader spectrum of deaf and hard of hearing children and youth, their families, and the New Jersey deaf community.

The task force is required to issue a report to the Governor, the State Board of Education, and the Legislature within six months of its organization, which contains its findings and recommendations concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf.