



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

March 8, 2024

The Honorable Senator Pamela Beidle
Chair, Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: Senate Bill 991 – Behavioral Health - Language Assistance Services Pilot Program – Letter of Information

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of information for Senate Bill (SB) 991 – Behavioral Health - Language Assistance Services Pilot Program.

The purpose of SB 991 is to establish the Language Assistance Services Pilot Program in the Behavioral Health Administration. This pilot program will provide grants to local behavioral health authorities in order to reimburse behavioral health providers for language assistance services for children with limited English proficiency accessing and receiving behavioral health services and parents and guardians coordinating the provision of behavioral health services and making health care decisions regarding the services on behalf of a child.

To achieve these goals, the bill proposes a mandated appropriation of \$120,000 for FY25 and FY26 in the annual state budget. Additionally, the bill stipulates a minimum of three \$30,000 grants, respectively for FY25 and FY26, be provided to grantees in addition to any request for reimbursement.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act already require access to accurate, impartial, and effective services for behavioral health care at no cost to children and adolescents with limited English proficiency. Compliance actions include offering a qualified interpreter to an individual with LEP for oral interpretation and a qualified translator when translating written content in paper or electronic form. Because the translation services are required by civil rights laws, costs for the services cannot be passed on to the patient.¹

In short, these services are already required under federal law as cited above and offered at no cost to patients through many insurance plans.

If you have any further questions, please contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

¹ American Medical Association (2017). Affordable Care Act, Section 1557 Fact sheet. Accessed March 6, 2024: <https://www.ama-assn.org/media/14241/download>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'LH Scott', enclosed in a light blue rectangular box.

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary