



**MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE**

**March 8, 2024**

**SB 991**

**Behavioral Health – Language Assistance Services Pilot Program**

**Senate Finance Committee**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 991. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 991 would establish the Language Assistance Services Pilot Program in the Behavioral Health Administration. This bill is an important step towards ensuring equitable access to behavioral health services for children with limited English proficiency and their families.

Every individual is deserving of respect, dignity, and the opportunity to live a full and healthy life. However, language barriers can pose significant obstacles to accessing essential services, including behavioral health care, particularly for children and families who are not proficient in English. By establishing the Language Assistance Services Pilot Program, we affirm our commitment to ensuring that all children and families have access to the care and support they need to thrive.

The provision of grants to local behavioral health authorities to reimburse providers for language assistance services is a compassionate and practical response to the needs of children and families facing language barriers. These services play a crucial role in facilitating effective communication between providers and patients, ensuring that children and families can fully understand their treatment options, participate in care decisions, and access the support they need to address behavioral health concerns.

The MCC commends the focus of the pilot program on supporting parents and guardians who are coordinating the provision of behavioral health services and making health care decisions on behalf of their children. Parental involvement is essential for the well-being and success of children, and providing language assistance services to parents and guardians ensures that they can fully participate in their child's care and advocate for their needs effectively.

Accordingly, the Conference appreciates your consideration and, for these reasons, respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 991.

