



MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

Dedicated to the rights and quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Maryland

House Health and Government Operations Committee

HB 987: State Government – Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency - Modifications

March 5, 2024

Position: Letter of Information



8601 Robert Fulton Dr
Suite 140
Columbia, MD 21046



1500 Union Avenue
Suite 2000
Baltimore, MD 21211



8835 Columbia 100 Pky
Suite P
Columbia, MD 21044



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

217 E Redwood Street
Suite 1300
Baltimore, MD 21202



7000 Tudsbury Road
Windsor Mill, MD 21244

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Coalition (DD Coalition) is comprised of five statewide organizations that are committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. Each organization is led by a diverse group of people.

WHAT does this bill do?

- Requires State departments, agencies, and programs take more steps to provide equal access to public services public services for people with limited English proficiency by having a language access compliance program coordinator, establishing a language access plan, conducting outreach, providing interpretation at any public forum, and other things.
- Adds the Developmental Disabilities Administration to the list of departments.
- Outlines requirements of each Language Access Plan and designates the Office of Attorney General to provide oversight and enforcement of the compliance of each department, agency, and program.

Maryland offers a wide array of public services across the State. Often those services are hard to navigate particularly for Marylanders with limited English proficiency. According to the American Community Survey, about 19.5% of Marylanders speak a language other than English. Yet, for example, we know that less than 2% of the people accessing vocational rehabilitation services and services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration are Hispanic or Latino.

We appreciate the intent of HB 987 to make sure that all people, even those that do not speak English proficiently, have access to all of the services and supports Maryland offers. The current law does not reflect changes in Maryland's services and supports. When originally codified two decades ago, the Department of Disabilities did not exist. Neither did the Departments of Service and Civic Innovation and Emergency Management. All of these agencies should be listed in the law and the Council has submitted testimony with these suggestions on HB 981. The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) was required to implement the original requirements by 2003. Therefore, the Developmental Disabilities Administration as part of the MDH is already included in the statute and was also required to implement the original requirements by 2003.

The State is undergoing a great deal of change – there is a renewed commitment by top leadership to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Oversight and technical assistance are needed to ensure Maryland lives up to the intent of the original law passed more than 20 years ago. However, the enforcement of penalties may not help eliminate communication barriers and foster more inclusion for all Marylanders – goals envisioned in this bill. States that have been successful in implementing language access solutions have done so with comprehensive plans and resources developed in collaboration with state and community leaders.

Contact: Rachel London, Executive Director, DD Council RLondon@md-council.org