

**House Bill 987**  
**Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency**  
Health and Government Operations Committee  
March 5<sup>th</sup> 2024  
**Support**

**Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports HB 987**, which would strengthen oversight and enforcement of Maryland's Language Access Law to expand access for limited English proficient (LEP) individuals.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, achieve economic independence, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As a leading provider of human services in Maryland, our extensive experience assisting Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals and families underscores the significant barriers created by the lack of language access to essential services. For example, in our efforts to help clients secure emergency shelter, we've encountered situations where calls are abruptly disconnected upon realizing the client's inability to communicate in English with state or local agencies. Moreover, we've observed inconsistencies in interpretation services within various programs, including shelters and childcare scholarships, resulting in inaccurate or incomplete information exchange and subsequent confusion. Recently, a troubling incident occurred where several clients were initially placed in a shelter, only to be denied access the next day due to language barriers—the shelter lacked bilingual staff and failed to utilize the language line, while the clients did not speak English. This led to confusion and frustration among the clients, highlighting the critical need for effective communication in such situations.

In Maryland, equal access to public services is not just a moral imperative but also a legal right established by federal civil rights law and the state's 2002 Language Access Law.<sup>1,2</sup> For LEP individuals navigating complex systems, understanding basic paperwork can determine whether critical needs are met. HB 987 aims to address current legal gaps by appointing agency Language Access Compliance Program Coordinators, updating language access plans, and mandating vital document translations at lower LEP population thresholds. Furthermore, it would empower the Attorney General's office to oversee implementation and address violations. As Maryland's LEP population continues to grow, the passage of HB 987 represents a crucial stride towards equity and inclusion.

**For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 987.**

Submitted By: Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy.

1. Office of Equal Opportunity - LEP Program Overview - MDOT SHA . roads.maryland.gov. Accessed November 2, 2023. <https://roads.maryland.gov/mdotsha/pages/Index.aspx?PageId=445>
2. Hofstetter J, Mchugh M, O'toole A. A Framework for Language Access Key Features of U.S. State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies.; 2021. [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/language-access-2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/language-access-2021_final.pdf)