



# Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

**HB 1473: State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities**

**April 3, 2025**

**Position: Letter of Information**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. From this perspective, the Council knows and understands that public services must be accessible so everyone can benefit.

**Many people in Maryland use a language other than English to communicate and understand information.** For example, according to the Migration Policy Institute, among Marylanders ages 18-64, 23.2% speak a language other than English and 9.3% speak English less than “very well”. The Maryland Deaf Community Center reports that about 19% of people in Maryland are Deaf and hard of hearing, some of whom use American Sign Language or other signed languages to communicate. There are also many people with disabilities who use assistive technologies to communicate and understand information such as people who are nonverbal that use ACC devices (augmentative and alternative communication devices) or the Blind who use screen readers.

**Maryland offers many public services across the State. Those services are hard to navigate particularly for Marylanders with limited English proficiency.** For example, in Maryland, 10.6% of the adult population speaks Spanish<sup>i</sup> and 12.6% of adults identify as Hispanic or Latino<sup>ii</sup>, but less than 2% of the people accessing vocational rehabilitation services and services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration are Hispanic or Latino.<sup>iii</sup>

**This bill will complement work already in progress by many state agencies and strengthen the ability of all Marylanders to access public services.** We want to highlight two important initiatives:

1. **The Maryland Department of Information Technology, the Maryland Department of Disabilities, and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council are collaborating on the Maryland Plain Language Initiative (Exec. Order No. 01.01.2024.25).** This effort will establish Plain Language Standards for the State of Maryland. The goal is to make all written communication by state agencies, including websites, accessible to the broadest general public audience possible.

2. **The Maryland Vehicle Administration collaborated with the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council to re-write their driver's permit test in Plain Language.** This allowed MVA to translate the tests into 17 other languages including American Sign Language. In the first 2 months the new test was offered, 15% more Marylanders passed. These results show how increasing language access improves the public experience due to tests that focus on content knowledge versus test-taking skills. The results also show how access improves government services by being more efficient with the resources available to the public.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/MD>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST040223>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://jubileemd.org/download/enriqueciendo-vidas-advocacy-letter-october-2023-english-language/?wpdmdl=20971&refresh=6532c07c2d8c01697824892>