

# HOUSE BILL 1473

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By: **Delegates Acevero, Addison, Alston, Amprey, Fair, Fennell, Harris, Hill, Kerr, Lehman, R. Lewis, Martinez, Mireku–North, Roberson, Ruff, Sample–Hughes, Simmons, Simpson, Smith, Taveras, Turner, Williams, Woods, Woorman, and Young**

Introduced and read first time: February 7, 2025

Assigned to: Health and Government Operations

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## A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **State Government – Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With**  
3 **Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities**

4 FOR the purpose of altering provisions of law relating to equal access to public services for  
5 individuals with limited English proficiency to include individuals with disabilities;  
6 establishing certain requirements for equal access to public services for certain State  
7 departments, agencies, or programs, including developing a language access plan for  
8 certain individuals; requiring the Governor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs to oversee,  
9 monitor, investigate, and enforce certain provisions of law; requiring certain State  
10 departments, agencies, and programs to implement certain provisions of law on or  
11 before certain dates; and generally relating to equal access to public services for  
12 individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities.

13 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,  
14 Article – State Government  
15 Section 9–3301(a) and (e)  
16 Annotated Code of Maryland  
17 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

18 BY adding to  
19 Article – State Government  
20 Section 9–3303.1  
21 Annotated Code of Maryland  
22 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

23 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
24 Article – State Government  
25 Section 10–1102 and 10–1103

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 Annotated Code of Maryland  
2 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

3 Preamble

4 WHEREAS, Maryland is a state rich in diverse languages and cultures with more  
5 than 333,000 residents who identify as having limited English proficiency; and

6 WHEREAS, More than 670,000 Marylanders live with a disability or identify as  
7 having limited English proficiency; and

8 WHEREAS, Limited English proficiency designations are impacted by the context,  
9 such as school, courtroom, and online applications, and type of communication, such as  
10 speaking, writing, and reading; and

11 WHEREAS, An individual's primary and preferred language should never be a  
12 barrier to access public services; and

13 WHEREAS, Certain departments, agencies, and programs in State government have  
14 a duty to provide meaningful access to programs and services to all Marylanders, including  
15 individuals with limited English proficiency; and

16 WHEREAS, It is in the interest and obligation of the State to ensure that individuals  
17 with limited English proficiency are treated with dignity and respect and provided timely  
18 and effective access to public services; now, therefore,

19 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
20 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

21 **Article – State Government**

22 9–3301.

23 (a) In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.

24 (e) “Office” means the Governor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs.

25 **9–3303.1.**

26 **(A) ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2027, THE OFFICE SHALL:**

27 **(1) DEVELOP A STRATEGY TO ENFORCE THE REQUIREMENTS UNDER**  
28 **§ 10–1103 OF THIS ARTICLE FOR EACH IDENTIFIED STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY,**  
29 **OR PROGRAM;**

1           **(2) OVERSEE, MONITOR, INVESTIGATE, AND ENFORCE COMPLIANCE**  
2 **WITH § 10–1103 OF THIS ARTICLE FOR EACH IDENTIFIED STATE DEPARTMENT,**  
3 **AGENCY, OR PROGRAM;**

4           **(3) DESIGNATE A LANGUAGE ACCESS COMPLIANCE PROGRAM**  
5 **DIRECTOR;**

6           **(4) PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, IN**  
7 **CONSULTATION WITH THE MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES AND THE**  
8 **GOVERNOR’S OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING, ON THE**  
9 **DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF LANGUAGE ACCESS PLANS AND POLICIES**  
10 **TO STATE DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES, AND PROGRAMS IDENTIFIED UNDER §**  
11 **10–1103 OF THIS ARTICLE; AND**

12           **(5) IN PERFORMING THE DUTIES REQUIRED UNDER THIS**  
13 **SUBSECTION, SOLICIT FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH PUBLIC**  
14 **COMMENT.**

15           **(B) THE OFFICE MAY DEVELOP AND UPDATE LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY**  
16 **AND LANGUAGE ACCESS STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE TEMPLATES FOR A**  
17 **STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM IDENTIFIED UNDER § 10–1103 OF THIS**  
18 **ARTICLE.**

19           **(C) BEGINNING IN FISCAL YEAR 2027, THE GOVERNOR SHALL INCLUDE IN**  
20 **THE ANNUAL BUDGET BILL AN APPROPRIATION OF \$400,000 FOR THE OFFICE TO**  
21 **IMPLEMENT THE PROVISIONS OF THIS SECTION.**

22 10–1102.

23           (a) In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.

24           (b) **(1)** “Equal access” means to be informed of, participate in, and benefit from  
25 public services offered by a State department, agency, or program, at a level equal to  
26 English proficient individuals.

27           **(2) “EQUAL ACCESS” INCLUDES THE ABILITY TO RECEIVE LANGUAGE**  
28 **ASSISTANCE THAT:**

29                   **(I) ENSURES ACCURATE, TIMELY, AND EFFECTIVE**  
30 **COMMUNICATION AT NO COST TO THE INDIVIDUAL; AND**

31                   **(II) IS NOT SIGNIFICANTLY RESTRICTED, DELAYED, OR OF**  
32 **LOWER QUALITY COMPARED TO PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE TO**  
33 **ENGLISH–PROFICIENT INDIVIDUALS.**

1 [(c) "Limited English proficiency" means the inability to adequately understand  
2 or express oneself in the spoken or written English language.]

3 (C) "LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN" MEANS A WRITTEN DOCUMENT THAT  
4 STANDARDIZES THE LANGUAGE ACCESS COMPLIANCE POLICY, STANDARD  
5 OPERATING PROCEDURE, REPORTING, AND COMPLAINT PROCESS FOR EACH STATE  
6 DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM.

7 (d) ["Oral language] "LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE services" includes various  
8 methods to provide verbal information and interpretation such as:

9 (1) staff interpreters, bilingual staff, telephone interpreter programs, and  
10 private interpreter programs; AND

11 (2) SIGN LANGUAGES, BRAILLE, TDD/TT/TTY, LARGE PRINT, PLAIN  
12 LANGUAGE, AND OTHER COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATIONS USED BY  
13 INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

14 (E) "LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY" MEANS A LIMITED ABILITY TO READ,  
15 WRITE, SPEAK, OR UNDERSTAND ENGLISH IN A MANNER THAT ALLOWS EFFECTIVE  
16 COMMUNICATION WITH A STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM TO HAVE  
17 ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATE IN SERVICES, ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS, OR OTHER  
18 BENEFITS ADMINISTERED BY THE STATE.

19 [(e)] (F) "Program" means all of the operations of a State department, State  
20 agency, or any other instrumentality of the State.

21 (G) "PUBLIC CONTACT POSITIONS" ARE POSITIONS IN A STATE  
22 DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM FOR WHICH THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES  
23 INCLUDE GREETING, MEETING, OR PROVIDING INFORMATION OR SERVICES TO THE  
24 PUBLIC.

25 [(f)] (H) (1) "Vital documents" means all applications or informational  
26 materials, notices, and complaint forms offered by State departments, agencies, and  
27 programs THAT ARE CRITICAL FOR ACCESSING A STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR  
28 PROGRAM.

29 (2) "VITAL DOCUMENTS" INCLUDE:

30 (I) EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RISK COMMUNICATIONS;

31 (II) ONLINE AND PAPER APPLICATIONS;

- 1                   **(III) CONSENT FORMS;**
- 2                   **(IV) COMPLAINT FORMS;**
- 3                   **(V) ALL CATEGORIES OF LETTERS OR NOTICES PERTAINING TO**  
4 **THE ELIGIBILITY FOR STATE BENEFITS;**
- 5                   **(VI) WRITTEN TESTS EVALUATING COMPETENCY FOR A LICENSE,**  
6 **JOB, OR SKILL FOR WHICH ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IS NOT REQUIRED;**
- 7                   **(VII) DOCUMENTS THAT ARE REQUIRED BY LAW; AND**
- 8                   **(VIII) NOTICES AT NO COST REGARDING THE AVAILABILITY OF**  
9 **LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH**  
10 **PROFICIENCY.**

11                   **[(2)] (3)** “Vital documents” does not include applications and  
12 examinations related to the licensure, certification, or registration under the Health  
13 Occupations Article, Financial Institutions Article, Business Occupations and Professions  
14 Article, and Business Regulation Article within the jurisdiction of the Maryland  
15 Department of Health or the Maryland Department of Labor.

16 10–1103.

17                   (a) Each State department, agency, or program listed or identified under  
18 subsection (c) of this section shall:

19                   **(1) SUBJECT TO SUBSECTION (B) OF THIS SECTION, DEVELOP A**  
20 **LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN;**

21                   **(2) take reasonable steps to provide equal access to public services for**  
22 **individuals with limited English proficiency[.] WHO NEED LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE,**  
23 **INCLUDING ANY ORAL, WRITTEN, AND SIGN LANGUAGE SERVICES NEEDED TO ASSIST**  
24 **INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND INDIVIDUALS WITH**  
25 **DISABILITIES TO:**

26                   **(I) COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH STATE PERSONNEL AND**  
27 **CONTRACTORS;**

28                   **(II) GAIN EQUAL ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES; AND**

29                   **(III) PROVIDE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE**  
30 **SERVICES, ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS, OR OTHER BENEFITS PROVIDED BY A STATE**  
31 **DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM;**

1           **(3) PROVIDE ORAL LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE, INCLUDING**  
 2 **INTERPRETATION IN NON-ENGLISH LANGUAGES PROVIDED IN PERSON OR**  
 3 **REMOTELY BY A QUALIFIED INTERPRETER FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WITH LIMITED**  
 4 **ENGLISH PROFICIENCY;**

5           **(4) ARRANGE FOR QUALIFIED BILINGUAL OR MULTILINGUAL STAFF**  
 6 **TO COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH**  
 7 **PROFICIENCY;**

8           **(5) PROVIDE NOTICES OF THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES**  
 9 **THAT ARE AVAILABLE; AND**

10           **[(b) Reasonable steps to provide equal access to public services include:**

11           **(1) the provision of oral language services for individuals with limited**  
 12 **English proficiency, which must be through face-to-face, in-house oral language services**  
 13 **if contact between the agency and individuals with limited English proficiency is on a**  
 14 **weekly or more frequent basis;]**

15           **[(2) (i) (6) ARRANGE FOR the translation of vital documents**  
 16 **ordinarily provided to the public into any language spoken by any limited English proficient**  
 17 **population that constitutes [3%] 0.5% of the [overall] population [within the geographic**  
 18 **area served by a local office of a] OF THE State [program] as measured by the United States**  
 19 **Census[; and**

20           **(ii) the provision of vital documents translated under item (i) of this**  
 21 **item on a statewide basis to any local office as necessary; and**

22           **(3) any additional methods or means necessary to achieve equal access to**  
 23 **public services].**

24           **(B) (1) IN DEVELOPING THE LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN REQUIRED UNDER**  
 25 **SUBSECTION (A)(1) OF THIS SECTION, EACH STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR**  
 26 **PROGRAM SHALL:**

27           **(I) DETERMINE THE NUMBER OR PERCENTAGE OF**  
 28 **INDIVIDUALS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY WHO ARE ELIGIBLE TO BE**  
 29 **SERVED BY, OR LIKELY TO HAVE AN ENCOUNTER WITH, THE STATE DEPARTMENT,**  
 30 **AGENCY, OR PROGRAM;**

31           **(II) ESTIMATE THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH INDIVIDUALS**  
 32 **WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY WILL COME INTO CONTACT WITH THE STATE**  
 33 **DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM; AND**

1           **(III) DETERMINE THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE RESOURCES**  
2 **AVAILABLE TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM.**

3           **(2) EACH STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM SHALL**  
4 **UPDATE THE LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN EVERY 2 YEARS AND INCLUDE:**

5           **(I) THE TYPES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE**  
6 **SERVICES THAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM WILL PROVIDE;**

7           **(II) A LIST OF THE LANGUAGES, INCLUDING DIALECTS, OR**  
8 **FORMS OF COMMUNICATION FOR WHICH A STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR**  
9 **PROGRAM WILL PROVIDE LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES AND THE RATIONALE**  
10 **FOR SELECTING THE LANGUAGES, DIALECTS, OR FORMS OF COMMUNICATION;**

11           **(III) AN EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE ADEQUACY OF**  
12 **THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED;**

13           **(IV) A DESCRIPTION AND FREQUENCY OF TRAINING FOR PUBLIC**  
14 **CONTACT STAFF ON THE LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN;**

15           **(V) THE PROCESS FOR FILING A COMPLAINT RELATED TO A**  
16 **LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICE; AND**

17           **(VI) A DESCRIPTION OF THE FUNDING AND BUDGETARY**  
18 **SOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN.**

19           (c) **(1)** The provisions of this section shall be fully implemented according to  
20 the following schedule:

21           **[(1)] (I) ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2027, FULL IMPLEMENTATION BY**  
22 **THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS; AND**

23           **(II) on or before July 1, [2003] 2028, full implementation by:**

24           **[(i)] the Department of Human Services;**

25           **[(ii)] the Maryland Department of Labor;**

26           **[(iii)] the Maryland Department of Health;**

27           **[(iv)] the Department of Juvenile Services; and**

28           **[(v)] the Workers' Compensation Commission;**

- 1           (2)    on or before July 1, 2004, full implementation by:
- 2                   (i)     the Department of Aging;
- 3                   (ii)    the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services;
- 4                   (iii)  the Department of Transportation, not including the Maryland  
5 Transit Administration;
- 6                   (iv)   the Commission on Civil Rights;
- 7                   (v)    the Department of State Police; and
- 8                   (vi)  five independent agencies, boards, or commissions, to be  
9 determined by the Secretary of Human Services, in consultation with the Office of the  
10 Attorney General;
- 11           (3)    on or before July 1, 2005, full implementation by:
- 12                   (i)     the Comptroller of Maryland;
- 13                   (ii)    the Department of Housing and Community Development;
- 14                   (iii)  the Maryland Transit Administration;
- 15                   (iv)   the Department of Natural Resources;
- 16                   (v)    the Maryland State Department of Education;
- 17                   (vi)  the Office of the Attorney General; and
- 18                   (vii)  five independent agencies, boards, or commissions to be  
19 determined by the Secretary of Human Services, in consultation with the Office of the  
20 Attorney General;
- 21           (4)    on or before July 1, 2006, full implementation by:
- 22                   (i)     the Department of Agriculture;
- 23                   (ii)    the Department of Commerce;
- 24                   (iii)  the Department of Veterans and Military Families;
- 25                   (iv)   the Department of the Environment; and



1 (v) five independent agencies, boards, or commissions to be  
 2 determined by the Secretary of Human Services, in consultation with the Office of the  
 3 Attorney General;]

4 1. THE WORKERS' COMPENSATION COMMISSION;

5 2. THE COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS;

6 3. THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE;

7 4. THE COMPTROLLER OF MARYLAND;

8 5. THE MARYLAND TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION;

9 6. THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION;

10 7. THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL;

11 8. FIVE INDEPENDENT AGENCIES, BOARDS, OR  
 12 COMMISSIONS, TO BE DETERMINED BY THE SECRETARY OF HUMAN SERVICES, IN  
 13 COLLABORATION WITH THE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL; AND

14 [(5)] 9. [on or before July 1, 2025, full implementation by] each  
 15 principal department listed under § 8–201 of this article[; and].

16 [(6)] (2) [if] IF a principal department is created on or after October 1,  
 17 [2024] 2028, the principal department shall comply with the requirements of this section  
 18 beginning 1 year after the date on which the principal department is created.

19 (D) ON OR BEFORE SEPTEMBER 30 EACH YEAR, EACH STATE DEPARTMENT,  
 20 AGENCY, OR PROGRAM IDENTIFIED UNDER SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION SHALL  
 21 SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS THAT  
 22 CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION FOR THE PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR:

23 (1) A SUMMARY OF ALL ACTIVITIES PERFORMED, INCLUDING A  
 24 SELF-ASSESSMENT AND EXPLANATION OF ANY UNMET OBJECTIVES;

25 (2) THE TOTAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED FROM THE TOTAL  
 26 POPULATION SERVED BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM,  
 27 DISAGGREGATED BY LANGUAGE;

28 (3) THE NUMBER AND TYPES OF LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES  
 29 PROVIDED, DISAGGREGATED BY LANGUAGE;

1           **(4) THE NAMES OF ALL ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVING GRANTS OR**  
2 **CONTRACTS TO PROVIDE LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES FROM THE STATE**  
3 **DEPARTMENT, AGENCY, OR PROGRAM;**

4           **(5) AN ITEMIZED BUDGET FOR LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES**  
5 **EXPENDITURES;**

6           **(6) A LIST OF QUALIFIED BILINGUAL OR MULTILINGUAL PERSONNEL**  
7 **EMPLOYED IN PUBLIC CONTACT POSITIONS BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT, AGENCY,**  
8 **OR PROGRAM; AND**

9           **(7) THE NUMBER OF LANGUAGE ACCESS COMPLAINTS RECEIVED, THE**  
10 **CURRENT STATUS OF THE COMPLAINTS, AND THE STEPS TAKEN TO RESOLVE THE**  
11 **COMPLAINTS.**

12           SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect  
13 October 1, 2025.