

**HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
HB 1144 - State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With
Limited English Proficiency – Modifications**

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 8, 2023**



Health Care for the Homeless supports HB 1144, which would strengthen Maryland’s language access law by requiring state departments, agencies and programs to designate a language access compliance coordinator and establish a language access policy and plan. It also requires these entities to engage in outreach to communities with limited English proficiency (“LEP”) regarding vital information, including language access plans and benefits and services offered by the entity.

Health Care for the Homeless routinely works with a number of state departments and agencies and, with a growing number of clients who are persons with limited English proficiency, it’s exceedingly important to help ensure that our state remains in compliance with state and federal language access laws so that no person is turned away from public services on the basis of language.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS),¹ LEP individuals are less likely to get routine check-ups and receive needed health care due to language barriers. LEP individuals are also less likely to seek other critically-needed social services because their language would not be understood and seeking services would be futile. HB 1144 would boost equity and quality of care for human services by recognizing the critical role the provision of language services plays in ensuring that individuals with limited English proficiency are afforded equal and meaningful access to government programs and activities.

Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that federal financial assistance recipients, including state agencies, take reasonable steps in providing meaningful access to their programs, services and activities to persons with limited English proficiency. This requirement is mirrored in Maryland law, Md. State Govt. § 10-1103, which requires that certain state departments, agencies and programs take reasonable steps to provide equal access to public services for individuals with limited English proficiency. HB 1144 would help meet the requirements and intention of these laws.

It is imperative that state agencies provide language assistance services for individuals with limited English proficiency and we urge a favorable report on HB 1144.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland’s leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.

Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.

For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.

¹ [Guide to Developing a Language Access Plan \(cms.gov\)](https://www.cms.gov/Regulatory-and-Compliance/Guidance/FAQs/2017/03/guide-to-developing-a-language-access-plan)