



JOHNS HOPKINS

SCHOOL *of* NURSING

House Bill 1144

State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals

With Limited English Proficiency - Modifications

March 8, 2023

SUPPORT

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

We are a group of nursing students from the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. Our clinical rotation is currently at Centro Sol – Bayview's Children's Medical Practice. From January 31 to March 6 of this year, we have assisted in making over 50 referrals with over 50 more pending for mental health treatment. Throughout this time, we have experienced great difficulty in securing mental health treatment (therapy and psychiatry alike) for patients and parents who are Spanish speaking. Specifically, these issues stem beyond language barriers with patients alone, as many mental health providers will not take patients who speak English if their parents are Spanish speaking. To this day, we are unable to locate sufficient mental health services that can accommodate for Spanish speaking families who also accept any form of insurance. For these reasons, we have many patients with high acuity mental health needs who are unable to be seen. Language access is vital in providing equitable mental health services as it ensures the accuracy of reported medical symptoms, medical testimony, and possible treatments or referrals that may be implemented in a patient's plan of care. The current lack of language services places our patients at undue risk as their mental health care is significantly delayed. Integrating interpretive language services would break down this barrier and help facilitate effective communication and understanding between government agencies and individuals with limited English proficiency navigating social services. HB1144 appreciates the vital role that language services play in safeguarding our patient's rights to equitable access to all government programs and activities.

Therefore, Johns Hopkins School of Nursing is submitting testimony in support of HB 1144, which would require state departments, agencies and programs to designate a language access compliance coordinator, establish a language access policy and plan and take other actions to ensure reasonable access to the entity's programs and activities for individuals with limited English proficiency. It also requires the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights to provide oversight, monitoring, investigation and enforcement of certain language access provisions.

We respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB283.

Sincerely,

Yemine Gonzalez, Rachel DePencier, Chloe Romero, Greyson Canterbury, Wendy Mazariegos & Brian Reyna