



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB0981

March 28, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 981 – Principal Departments - Individuals with Limited English Proficiency - Access to Public Services

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) supports House Bill (HB) 981.

HB 981 seeks to strengthen protections related to access to public services for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEPs) across many executive departments. By fully implementing provisions to overcome language barriers within executive departments and requiring all future departments established after October 1st, 2024 to comply with these provisions, this bill will promote equitable access to public information and resources for all Maryland families. This would, in turn, promote more thorough integration and self-sufficiency among new residents of the State of Maryland and those who are historically excluded from services and programs due to language barriers. The ability to access emergency information, public benefits, and other critical services quickly and adequately would significantly improve the safety and well-being of LEP families and individuals.

In response to the unique challenges that LEP families face in accessing public services, the City of Baltimore established the Baltimore New American Access Coalition (BNAAC), an ARPA-funded project that provides benefit navigation services to eligible LEP families in Baltimore City. The BNAAC program is managed by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA), whose mission is to promote community-wellbeing, economic development, and the integration of immigrant communities by identifying needs and opportunities that immigrants bring to our city. Since February 2023, BNAAC has served 569 families and facilitated access to State and Local public benefits for 402 families. When the BNAAC project ends in December 2024, many of these families will be at risk of losing access to public benefits unless additional efforts are made to overcome language barriers.

Moreover, HB 981's intent to fully implement language accessibility provisions across State executive departments is consistent with best practices shared across federal, state, and local governments.

HB 981 represents a crucial step towards ensuring equitable access to public services for all Maryland residents and improving the overall health and well-being of our communities. For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report for HB 981.