



MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

Dedicated to the rights and quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Maryland



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House Health and Government Operations Committee
HB 981: Maryland Department of Disabilities – Individuals With Limited English Proficiency – Access to Public Services
March 5, 2024
Position: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Coalition (DD Coalition) is comprised of five statewide organizations that are committed to improving the opportunities and outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their families. Each organization is led by a diverse group of people. For that reason, we support HB 981 with the following amendment:

- On page 3, line 19: Add the **Department of Service and Civic Innovation and Department of Emergency Management**

WHAT does this bill do?

- Adds the Department of Disabilities to the list of State departments, agencies, and programs that already have to take steps to provide equal access to public services for people with limited English proficiency.

WHY is this important?

- **Updates current law to recognize changes in Maryland's services and supports.** This law, originally passed two decades ago, makes sure reasonable steps are taken to provide equal access to public services for people with limited English proficiency. When originally codified, the Department of Disabilities did not exist. Neither did the Departments of Service and Civic Innovation and Emergency Management.
- **Increases access to the services and supports Maryland provides.** Maryland offers a wide array of public services across the State. Often those services are hard to navigate particularly for Marylanders with limited English proficiency. According to the American Community Survey, about 19.5% of Marylanders speak a language other than English. Yet, for example, we know that less than 2% of the people accessing vocational rehabilitation services and services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration are Hispanic or Latino.

HB 981 with the amendments above recognizes that all people, even those that do not speak English proficiently, need access to all of the services and supports Maryland offers. For all of these reasons, the Coalition supports HB 981 with amendments.

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