



Date: March 5, 2025

To: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee and All Committee Members

From: Rob Malone, Chief Executive Officer, The Arc Prince George's County

Re: Testimony In Favor of HB 981

Dear Chair,

I am Rob Malone, Chief Executive Officer for The Arc Prince George's County. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB981. This bill is important to respond to demographic changes in our state and to eliminate disparities in the health and well-being of people of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The Arc supports people with developmental disabilities and their families from birth throughout life. We are a go-to organization for resources and support.

Two years ago, we initiated Hispanic outreach extend services and employment opportunities to Spanish speaking neighbors with developmental disabilities. The arena of disability services is a disjointed and confusing one - even more so when you do not speak English. People with limited English proficiency are many times unaware of the supports and resources available, and how to access them. As a result, these families are not receiving critical services they are eligible for that range in value from \$5,000 to \$150,000, annually. Families also forgo income from employment because of lack of day support for their loved ones with disabilities; they become full-time caregivers.

Data shows that while nearly 18% of Marylanders identify as Hispanic, less than 4% of the people we support identify as Hispanic. In Prince George's and Montgomery Counties, Hispanics make up a larger percentage of the population,

and number more than the total number of people who live in Anne Arundel County.

Think about all of the applications and interactions people with disabilities have to complete to get the services needed for their loved ones. They include:

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Medicaid
- Maryland Developmental Disability Administration (DDA)
- Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS)
- Metro Access
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Maryland State ID (MVA)

What have we learned:

- When interpretation services are provided during a workshop, people who do not speak English do not have any one to specifically follow-up with after the session to address specific concerns or receive assistance.
- When translating or interpreting matters specific to state services that the language vendor (staff) do not understand, important detail is missed or dropped in communication. This can also occur with online, automated or Google translation. Over the course of time, we need to push to have bi-lingual staff in state agencies to help ensure interpretation services are more accurate (and nuanced).
- We have seen families coded by DDA as having abandoned services, but they were coded that way after families tried to follow-up but were not provided with interpretation supports.
- State agencies are not collecting information on constituents' preferred language so they can distribute information properly.
- People are not exercising their rights because they don't feel they belong
- No one is accountable or even has a goal to help people with limited English proficiency get the information and assistance they need. People who do not speak English are struggling alone.

HB981 would significantly help address these inequities for people with limited English proficiency. Both language and outreach services are critical.

We must build capacity to help all Marylanders access state services. In our world, services such as day and employment programs provided by DDA are critical to a caregiver's ability to maintain their own employment. Communities that lack these supports are under-resourced in terms of the thousands of dollars in lost support and the economic drag of underemployment. For instance, the average value invested by the State in adult day services is approximately \$26,000 per year. If families do not know about this service or lack the support to access the service, they will lose that resource every year for the majority of their remaining lives.

I ask that you move HB981 with a favorable report to make sure we do not leave people behind. If you compare the reasonable accommodation requirements employers have to abide by for people with disabilities, you can see how this bill aligns that with the state making reasonable accommodations for people with limited English proficiency. State contractors, with appropriate funding, should also be required to make similar accommodations, and they should be able to leverage the state's rates with vendors providing language and translation support.

Thank you for your support.