

HB1473 (Unfavorable)

Honorable Senators

Please enter an Unfavorable report for HB1473.

I oppose

- altering provisions of law relating to equal access to public services for individuals with limited English proficiency to include individuals with disabilities;
- establishing certain requirements for equal access to public services for certain State departments, agencies, and programs, including developing a language access plan; and
- requiring the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to oversee, monitor, investigate, and enforce certain provisions of law.

Even though the mandated, annual appropriation of \$400,000 per year was removed via amendments, the fiscal and policy note from the first reader shows that this bill would cost at least \$1.5 million per year to implement. From the estimates I have seen, there will be another budget deficit next year (FY 2027). It may be even larger than estimated depending on how many wealthy families, businesses, and retirees flee the state because of the increased taxes and fees that will be imposed on us in FY 2026. Adding an additional program for FY 2027 when another budget deficit is looming is not good fiscal policy.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MDSE) testimony on March 11, this bill will greatly impact its operations and other state agencies. For example, MDSE stated

HB1473 will have a fiscal and operational impact on all state agencies, including MSDE. MSDE has submitted the analysis along with fiscal impact. American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation for events that last two or more hours requires the use of two interpreters to prevent interpreter fatigue. Foreign language interpreters are an additional cost. Notably, since the 2019 pandemic, on-site interpreters are more challenging to obtain and video remote interpretation services are more readily available.

To provide effective communications to constituents, agencies must provide these services by either hiring qualified interpreters or relying on oral interpretation and written document translation services from a vetted third-party vendor at no cost to the public. Relying on friends or family members of the constituent is strongly discouraged and traditionally prohibited under federal guidance due to privacy, confidentiality and accuracy concerns.

Please enter an Unfavorable report for HB1473.

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