

HB1473_Crossfile Bill_RichardKaplowitz_FWA

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TESTIMONY ON HB#/1473 - POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support with its amendments of HB#/1473, State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities

This bill was passed with amendments 110-26 on 03/17/25.

My Jewish faith teaches me in Leviticus 19:14 “You must not curse a deaf person. You must not place an obstacle before a blind person...”. This passage has been interpreted to create “The obligation of accessibility for, and inclusion of, disabled people”¹

The Torah states that each of us is created B'tzelem Elohim, in the image of G-d, (Genesis 1:27) and describes the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah welcoming strangers to their home. Yet, there are Jews with physical, developmental, emotional, intellectual and other disabilities who do not have the opportunities to participate in the richness of Jewish life because multiple barriers still exist in attitudes and access. When those barriers are eliminated, many Jews with disabilities find warmth, welcome and a sense of belonging to their Jewish community.²

This commandment applies to every person, not just the Jews, to do all we can to include all of G-d's children in the community as full participants.

This bill will accomplish this moral imperative by altering provisions of law relating to equal access to public services for individuals with limited English proficiency to include individuals with disabilities.

¹ <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/103369?lang=bi>

² https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/social_action/inclusion/hineinu-inclusion-resource-guide.pdf

It will accomplish this goal by establishing certain requirements for equal access to public services for certain State departments, agencies, and programs, including developing a language access plan. The authority for the actions contemplated will require the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to oversee, monitor, investigate, and enforce certain provisions of law; etc.

A joint resolution [was] submitted in both chambers of the Maryland General Assembly [that] aims to designate the state as a safe haven for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles. The proposal describes “attacks” on DEI as "harmful to the bottom line and health” of the state’s economy.

“The American Dream belongs to all of us, not just billionaires and multimillionaires,” the joint resolution reads. “DEI principles and policies promote equal access to opportunities, foster an environment of respect and belonging and ensure that every individual – regardless of background – can fully participate in all aspects of society.”³

While HJ4/SJ3 did not pass from their committees this bill, HB1473, is about providing inclusion in our society of people who are not currently afforded opportunities for full participation in all aspects of that society. Maryland can be a leader in this move to reflect that moral and ethical stand towards those individuals.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report with its amendments on HB#/1473.

³ <https://wjla.com/news/local/state-lawmakers-vow-to-make-maryland-dei-safe-haven-despite-3-billion-budget-shortfall-diversity-equity-inclusion-annapolis-spotlight>