

**House Bill 1473**  
**State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities**

**Hearing of the Senate Education, Energy & Environment Committee**  
**April 3, 2025**  
**1:00 PM**

**FAVORABLE**

**SUPPORT**

Equal Access Language Services LLC is dedicated to being a catalyst for a global cultural shift concerning language access, language justice, and language rights. We believe that all forms of discrimination should be eliminated and place language accessibility at the forefront of our anti-discrimination efforts and training. Equity and inclusion in a multilingual society are achievable only when language access is effectively implemented in both public and private sectors.

My name is Carol Velandia , a resident of District 8, and I am entering this testimony on behalf of Equal Access Language Services, my company, to express strong support for House Bill 1473. Our Vision is a world with meaningful access to communication and our Mission is to help companies and organizations to end language-based discrimination

Every person immigrating to the United States is seeking a life free from persecution, poverty, violence, or other hardships. These individuals, including myself, actively contribute to making America great—bringing our intellect, passion, and labor to enrich this nation daily. Our voices deserve to be heard regardless of the language that we speak.

Effective communication is foundational to any enduring relationship. It is the main diagnostic tool in healthcare, the guarantee to due process, and the assurance of a good education. In a multilingual society, language access is essential. Ethical public professionals must communicate effectively with the communities they serve, and their ethical mandate should not be compromised.

As a legal and medical interpreter, I witness ongoing injustices in language access. For example, José, a patient from Honduras, had his appointment delayed by two months because the hospital failed to request an interpreter thus endangering his health. Claudio was interrogated by police in broken Spanish, compromising legal integrity and due process. Martha's 11-year-old

daughter was taken out of school to interpret for her mom during a home purchase, placing undue responsibility on a child. The list goes on.

Communication inefficiencies also have significant economic implications. In the healthcare industry alone, research indicates that U.S. hospitals waste over \$12 billion annually due to poor communication. This demonstrates that language access and effective communication is not just a moral imperative but an economical one. This wasteful spending affects all taxpayers.

Enacting HB 1473 allows Maryland to reaffirm its commitment to inclusivity, ensuring all residents, regardless of language proficiency or ability, have meaningful and equal access to public services.

House Bill 1473 seeks to enhance equal access to public services in Maryland by:

- **Expanding Coverage:** Extending existing legal requirements to ensure that both individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) and individuals with disabilities receive necessary language assistance services, such as professional interpretation and translation.
- **Broadening Definitions:** Including sign languages, braille, and other communication accommodations in the definition of "language assistance services" to better serve LEP individuals and those with disabilities.
- **Establishing Oversight:** Empowering the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to oversee, monitor, investigate, and enforce compliance with state and federal language access laws, ensuring that language is not a barrier to accessing public services.

This legislation is particularly timely in light of recent federal changes. On March 1, 2025, President Trump signed an executive order designating English as the official language of the United States, which revoked Executive Order 13166. This revocation underscores the importance of state-level initiatives like HB 1473 to maintain robust language access rights, ensuring that all Maryland residents can continue to access essential public services without language barriers.

By enacting HB 1473, Maryland would reaffirm its commitment to inclusivity and equal access, addressing both current needs and potential gaps arising from federal policy changes.

Thank you and I, Carol G. Velandia P. and my company Equal Access Language Services respectfully urge this Committee to issue a favorable report for HB 1473. Should you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Carol Velandia at: 410-698-8250 or via email at: carolvelandia@equalaccesslanguageservices.com