

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

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

April 1, 2025

SUPPORT

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports House Bill 1473, which assigns the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to oversee, monitor, investigate, and enforce compliance with language access laws across state agencies, departments, and programs, requiring them to develop comprehensive language access plans.

For a century, Catholic Charities has provided care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We accompany Marylanders as they age with dignity, support their pursuit of employment and career advancement, heal from trauma and addiction, prepare for educational success, and welcome immigrant neighbors into Maryland communities.

As the largest private provider of human services in the state, Catholic Charities of Baltimore is committed to supporting immigrants, individuals with developmental disabilities and clients of all backgrounds and communication abilities, through our Esperanza Center, Gallagher Services programs and over 80 social services programs throughout the State of Maryland. Specifically, the Esperanza Center, serving as a vital resource for immigrants since 1963, provides essential services in education, healthcare, immigration legal matters, family reunification, and general community support to help immigrants from all over the world navigate life in their new country.

As an organization that works closely with thousands of immigrants and people in need each year, we understand the importance of language access. Our case managers regularly document serious barriers their clients face when attempting to access critical state services due to language limitations. Some specific examples include:

- Vital Records offices turning away clients with instructions to return with someone who speaks English
- Department of Social Services sending correspondence in English despite requests for correspondence in client's native language
- Phone interviews being conducted only in English or not happening at all, resulting in benefit denials
- Shelter services being inaccessible due to language barriers
- Social service agencies asking clients to provide their own interpreters for disability assessments and interviews
- Child Protective Services conducting cases without providing verbal or written communications in clients' native languages

These barriers arise because many state employees have not been adequately trained on language access laws and available language services. Additionally, essential forms are frequently not translated into languages spoken by significant portions of Maryland's population.

The expanded requirements and enforcement mechanisms in HB1473 would address these systemic issues and ensure that the over 333,000 Maryland residents with limited English proficiency and 670,000 Marylanders with disabilities can access vital state services with dignity and without unnecessary delays or complications.

For these reasons, Catholic Charities of Baltimore urges the committee to issue a favorable report for House Bill 1473.

Submitted By:

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