

House Bill 1473

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

April 3, 2025 – Hearing of the Senate Education, Energy & Environment Committee

FAVORABLE

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Garrett Bradford, and I am a resident of District 47. I support passage of HB 1473, which mandates that state departments, agencies, and programs establish a language access policy, plan, and complaint process.

The absence of language access in crucial public services like hospitals, courts, and schools does not only affect individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) but also impacts English-speaking monolingual U.S. citizens and residents. The reality is that language barriers affect everyone. For instance, what happens if the only witness to a crime like a mugging cannot speak English? What if a child with a contagious disease participates in a recreation center's event because her parents couldn't understand critical instructions at the doctor's office? Or what if a dangerous behavioral issue at school is not addressed properly because the parents cannot communicate with teachers? **These are real-world scenarios that can have a direct impact on all of us, regardless of language proficiency.** The potential consequences are real and it is vital that we understand the far-reaching importance of language access services.

Furthermore,

- HB 1473 recognizes the crucial role that providing language services plays in ensuring individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities have equal and meaningful access to government programs and services.
- HB 1473 would expand Maryland's definition of "language assistance services" to include sign language, Braille, TDD/TT/TTY, and other communication accommodations, ensuring both individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities have equal access to public services.
- HB 1473 would grant the necessary oversight, monitoring, investigation, and enforcement authority to the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. This will support compliance with state and federal language access laws, ensuring that language is not a barrier to accessing public services for communities with limited English proficiency and disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration. I respectfully urge this Committee to issue a favorable report for HB 1473.

Sincerely,

Garrett M. Bradford
Interpreter & Translator
Brentwood, Maryland