

3-11-2025 MD Language Access Testimony PDF.pdf

Uploaded by: Abril Schujman

Position: FAV

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1473

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

Hearing of the House Health & Government Operations Committee

March 11, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee, La Clínica del Pueblo is pleased to offer **favorable testimony in strong support of HB 1473 – Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities.**

La Clínica is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) providing comprehensive culturally competent health care and community services focusing on improving health outcomes for medically underserved populations. While our services began in the District of Columbia in 1983, our patient population is now mostly made up of Prince George's County residents, where we operate a primary care clinic and three school-based mental health programs.

Many of our patients rely on language access services to navigate essential programs such as healthcare, education, and housing. Last year, La Clínica conducted a community needs assessment, revealing that language barriers were one of the primary obstacles preventing them from improving their mental health and managing chronic conditions. With 83% of our patients having Limited English Proficiency (LEP), language access services are not just beneficial—they are essential to their care and a core component of La Clínica's model.

LEP remains a critical barrier to healthcare access. Research from Massachusetts General found that non-English speakers had 35% higher odds of ICU admission or death from COVID-19 compared to English speakers. Though LEP individuals make up over 8% of the U.S. population and 7% of Prince George's County, they face significant health disparities. LEP-discordant patients are more likely to experience poor clinician-patient interactions, including difficulties in communication, lack of trust, and instances of discrimination.

www.lcdp.org

PHI Fax (202) 319-3414

Non-PHI Fax (202) 667-3706



Washington DC

2831 15th St. NW,
Washington, DC 20009

☎ (202) 462-4788

La Casa

3166 Mt Pleasant St. NW,
Washington, DC 20010

☎ (202) 507-4800

Maryland

2970 Belcrest Center Dr. Unit 301,
Hyattsville, MD 20782

☎ (240) 714-5247

The absence of reliable medical interpretation services in medical facilities in MD led La Clínica to establish its own program, ensuring support in navigating the healthcare system and providing interpretation when referring clients to specialty care, promoting clear communication and continuity of care. In 2024, La Clínica provided medical interpretation services to 474 Maryland residents at 4,595 appointments. However, due to the high demand for interpretation services, we also rely on specialist offices to provide qualified medical interpreters when we are at capacity. When we follow up with patients, we frequently find that they were instructed to bring a friend or family member to interpret. In other cases, providers proceed with appointments using only limited Spanish. These situations increase the risk of miscommunication, potentially leading to misunderstandings about diagnoses, prescriptions, and treatment plans.

HB 1473 would require state departments, agencies and programs to establish a language access policy and plan as well as report annually on their plan, budget, language assistance services provided, and complaints received. It also designates the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs as the oversight, monitoring, investigation and enforcement body for Maryland's language access law. Finally, it provides an annual appropriation to the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to support this new role as well as their existing work.

By strengthening language access policies and oversight, HB 1473 takes a crucial step toward ensuring equitable access to essential services for LEP communities. Reliable medical interpretation is vital for patient safety and health outcomes, yet many individuals still face significant barriers. This legislation provides the necessary framework and funding to improve language access across state agencies, ultimately supporting the wellbeing of Maryland's diverse communities.

La Clínica respectfully urges this Committee to issue a favorable report for HB 1473

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

www.lcdp.org

PHI Fax (202) 319-3414

Non-PHI Fax (202) 667-3706



Washington DC

2831 15th St. NW,
Washington, DC 20009

☎ (202) 462-4788

La Casa

3166 Mt Pleasant St. NW,
Washington, DC 20010

☎ (202) 507-4800

Maryland

2970 Belcrest Center Dr. Unit 301,
Hyattsville, MD 20782

☎ (240) 714-5247

HB 1473 Maryland Language Access Public Services F

Uploaded by: Ashley Woolard

Position: FAV

LANGUAGE ACCESS ACT OF 2025 | HB 1473

SPONSORED BY DELEGATE GABRIEL ACEVERO

LANGUAGE ACCESS IS A HUMAN RIGHT

Maryland and federal law require certain state agencies, departments, and programs to provide meaningful access to their program, services, and activities to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) by providing *timely* and *free* language assistance services, like oral interpretation and written translation, from *qualified* interpreters and translators. This includes spoken languages, like Spanish and French, as well as signed languages, like American Sign Language.



BUT STATE AGENCIES ARE NOT CONSISTENTLY MEETING THESE LEGAL OBLIGATIONS.

When state agencies are not prepared to provide on-demand access to interpretation and translation services in the individual's primary and preferred language, LEP communities experience discrimination and harm, like:

- being turned away from state agency offices;
- unable to apply for safety net services that support low-income individuals and families;
- being told by frontline staff to bring a family member or friend to serve as an interpreter for appointments; and
- wrongful termination of critical benefits for households when letters containing instructions and deadlines are sent in English.

THESE RIGHTS ARE AT RISK UNDER THE NEW FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION.

On March 1st, through Executive Order 14224, the Trump Administration rescinded the nearly 25 year-old Executive Order 13166, which required federal agencies to provide language assistance services to individuals with LEP. This means that there is now no requirement for federal agencies to be linguistically inclusive. Maryland must move quickly to preserve and strengthen language access protections at the state level.



HB 1473 STRENGTHENS MARYLAND'S LANGUAGE ACCESS LAW

- Requires state agencies, departments, and programs to establish a language access plan and notify individuals with LEP about their right to free language assistance services. The plan must include a process for individuals to file a language access complaint with the entity.
- Designates the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs as the oversight, monitoring, investigation and enforcement body for Maryland's language access law
- Requires state agencies, departments, and programs to report annually on their language access plan and budget, language assistance services provided to community members, and language access complaints received

Vote **YES** on **HB 1473** to ensure that the more than 500,000 Marylanders with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities have meaningful and equal access to our public services.

HB 1473_PJC_FAVORABLE_EEE.pdf

Uploaded by: Ashley Woolard

Position: FAV



Ashley Woolard, Staff Attorney
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, ext. 224
woolarda@publicjustice.org

HB 1473
State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for
Individuals With LEP and Individuals with Disabilities
Hearing of The Senate Education, Energy & Environment Committee
April 3, 2025
1:00 PM

FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health and Benefits Equity Project advocates to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for Marylanders struggling to make ends meet. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. **PJC strongly supports HB 1473**, which would strengthen Maryland's language access law and preserve protections on the state level for individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities that may be rescinded on the federal level.

The failure of certain state agencies to consistently provide language assistance services to individuals with LEP and individuals with disabilities violates their right to be free from national origin and disability discrimination. As part of PJC's Health & Benefits Equity Project, we advocate for individuals with LEP to be afforded timely and consistent access to language assistance services, including interpretation and translation, in government-run services and health care settings. Together, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Md. Code Ann., State Govt. § 10-1103 require certain state agencies, departments, and programs to take reasonable steps to provide *equal* access to public services for individuals with LEP. But our clients and allies who assist individuals with LEP in navigating public services, including safety net services, frequently encounter language access violations in state-run agencies and programs. This includes refusals by frontline staff in agencies to provide oral interpretation by phone or in person; vital written communications about public benefits being written and sent to the client in English when the agency has documented that the client has LEP; and general failures of certain agencies to notify individuals with LEP of their right to free language services in accordance with state and federal law.

Miscommunications stemming from the failure to provide language access in certain cases have led to wrongful terminations of benefits for individuals with LEP where letters requesting required information by a certain date

The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.

were sent in English. In other cases, individuals with LEP have been unable to access certain agencies entirely where frontline staff have misinformed the individual that no language assistance services are available either in person or by phone.

PJC has serious concerns about the quickly changing legal landscape at the federal level under the current Administration, and how it will impact Marylanders with LEP. On March 1, 2025, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14224 which rescinded the nearly 25-year-old Executive Order 13166 of August 11, 2000 (Improving Access to Services for Persons with LEP) that required federal agencies to provide language assistance services, like interpretation and translation, to individuals with LEP.¹ This means that federal agencies are no longer required to provide free qualified interpreters or translate vital documents for individuals with LEP. We believe that there is a serious risk that the current federal Administration will also rollback rights afforded to individuals with LEP to receive language assistance services from federal financial assistance recipients, including state agencies and healthcare providers. Now is the time to strengthen and preserve these rights at the state level to insulate Marylanders with LEP from further restrictive changes to their rights.

HB 1473 broadens Maryland's law to make it more responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities. Our existing language access law leaves out critical forms of language assistance services, like Braille and large-print, necessary for individuals with disabilities, such as our communities who are deaf and hard of hearing or have vision impairment, to access public services. By broadening the definition of "language assistance services" to 1) include these specific forms of language assistance services and 2) add umbrella language, "other communication accommodations," to capture other forms not specified, HB 1473, if passed, would ensure that individuals with LEP and individuals with disabilities have meaningful access to public services.

HB 1473, if passed, would provide for stronger language access compliance in Maryland. It would require state departments, agencies, and programs to establish a language access policy and plan and take other actions to ensure reasonable access to the entity's programs and activities for individuals with LEP and individuals with disabilities. Having a comprehensive language access policy and plan is a best practice that helps entities determine which communities they may encounter and ensure that all staff are aware and adhere to their obligations to provide timely and professional language assistance services to LEP communities and individuals with disabilities.

HB 1473 provides a mechanism for strong language access rights enforcement. The bill would designate the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs as the oversight, monitoring, investigation and enforcement body for the State. Having a single point of contact for complaints and resolutions for language access violations would support community members with LEP and disabilities in addressing time sensitive language access violations without delay. Failure to provide language access can be national origin and disability discrimination and can create serious inequities between English-speakers and non-English speakers in who can access public services.

HB 1473 would help safeguard the rights of Marylanders with LEP and Marylanders with disabilities to access public services without discrimination. For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report for **HB 1473**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Woolard at 410-625-9409 ext. 224 or woolarda@publicjustice.org.

¹ Exec. Order No. 14,224, 90 C.F.R. 11363 (2025); Exec. Order No. 13,166, 65 C.F.R. 50121 (2000).

MLU Support Letter - HB1473.pdf

Uploaded by: Carlos Orbe, Jr.

Position: FAV

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 241
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for HB 1473 – Public Health – Permanent Makeup and Tattooing – Regulation and Consumer Protection

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) is honored to express our strong support for House Bill 1473, *Public Health – Permanent Makeup and Tattooing – Regulation and Consumer Protection*. This critical legislation establishes statewide licensure requirements for individuals and businesses providing tattooing and permanent makeup services, while empowering the Maryland Department of Health to implement consistent regulations that protect consumers and promote public health.

HB1473 responds to the growing and diverse demand for cosmetic tattooing services—including those related to medical recovery and cultural expression—by ensuring practitioners meet standardized training, safety, and hygiene criteria. These measures are vital for safeguarding Maryland residents from preventable infections, unsafe procedures, and unregulated environments.

This bill is particularly significant for immigrant and Latino communities, who often seek culturally aligned cosmetic services and may turn to informal providers due to language barriers or lack of access to licensed professionals. By expanding oversight and establishing clear consumer protections, HB1473 ensures equitable access to safe, regulated procedures—closing a critical public health gap in underserved areas.

Through our work across the state, MLU has seen how inconsistent regulation in this industry disproportionately impacts non-English speaking and underinsured clients. HB1473 offers a tangible solution by integrating equity-focused standards and education into public health enforcement.

Implications

HB1473 creates broader opportunities for workforce development and public health access, aligning closely with MLU’s mission to advance health equity and empower underrepresented communities. By professionalizing the field and mandating training, the bill opens pathways for bilingual and culturally competent practitioners—many of whom are Latino entrepreneurs—to enter a regulated industry with clarity and support.

The legislation also reduces systemic barriers for immigrant residents by requiring health and safety standards that all Marylanders, regardless of background or status, can rely on. MLU can

amplify the bill's impact by working with the Maryland Department of Health and local organizations to conduct culturally responsive outreach, offer compliance education in Spanish, and promote safe service provider directories statewide.

MLU urges the Health and Government Operations Committee to issue a favorable report on HB1473. This bill represents a vital advancement in public health regulation, consumer safety, and economic inclusion for Maryland's diverse communities.

Sincerely,

Carlos Orbe, Jr.

Communications and Public Affairs Specialist

Maryland Latinos Unidos

corbejr@mdlatinosunidos.org

EALS testimony in support of HB 1473.pdf

Uploaded by: Carol Velandia Pardo

Position: FAV

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

HB1473_Equal_Access_to_Public_Services_for_Individ

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR HB1473
Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency
and Individuals with Disabilities

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Acevero

Committee: Education, Energy, and the
Environment

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB1473 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Our members are concerned about the enormous share of our state's population affected by communication barriers, limiting understanding of state requirements and access to services. An estimated 400,000 immigrants have limited English proficiency, while people with communication disabilities make up 10 percent of our population. HB1473 would increase the accountability of our state agencies in providing enhanced communication pathways for individuals with limited language access.

Specifically, the bill requires state departments, agencies, and programs to implement language access plans that address the needs of individuals with limited English proficiency and disabilities. These plans must include provisions for translation and interpretation services, as well as accommodations for individuals with disabilities. The Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs will play a crucial role in overseeing, monitoring, investigating, and enforcing the bill's language access provisions within each state agency and department. These entities are to designate a language access compliance program director and develop an implementation plan.

HB1473 seeks to promote equal access to state agencies by addressing language barriers faced by individuals with limited English or communication abilities. By communicating more effectively, we better serve our diverse populations while fostering inclusion. These individuals help support our economy and pay into our tax base. It is only fair that we make our government as accessible as possible to all our residents.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_HB1473_SenateCros

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



April 3, 2025

House Bill 1473

**State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 1473 would alter 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; requiring the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to oversee, monitor, investigate, and enforce certain provisions of law.

Ensuring that state departments, agencies, and programs are accessible to individuals with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency is essential to fostering a just and equitable society. Providing accommodations such as sign language interpretation, braille, large print, plain language, and other communication supports—along with qualified translators and interpreters—would significantly improve access to public services. By implementing these measures, state agencies can also meet ADA requirements for effective communication, ensuring that individuals receive the assistance they need without being hindered by language barriers or the availability of a translator.

The ADA mandates that state and local governments (Title II entities) and public-serving businesses (Title III entities) provide equally effective communication for individuals with communication disabilities.¹ Likewise, individuals with limited English proficiency require language access services, including translation and interpretation, to fully engage with public services. This legislation reinforces those obligations by requiring state agencies and programs

¹ <https://www.ada.gov/resources/effective-communication/>

to submit an itemized budget for language assistance services. This would help identify and address gaps in accessibility, ensuring that services are responsive to community needs and that all individuals, regardless of disability or language proficiency, can fully participate in public resources. Rooted in the Catholic call for solidarity, this legislation affirms the inherent dignity of individuals, regardless of language or communication barriers, by ensuring they have the resources necessary to live with greater participation in society.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **HB 1473**.

Thank you for your consideration.

HB1473 Language Access Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Flavia Lima

Position: FAV

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Members

Health and Government Operations Committee

Maryland House of Delegates

6 Bladen Street

Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

I write today to urge your strong support for **Maryland HB1473, the Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities Act**. In the wake of the recent repeal of Executive Order 13166, which once safeguarded language access at the federal level, Maryland now has a pivotal opportunity—and responsibility—to step up where federal protections have fallen away.

This legislation is not just about policy; it is about **people—our neighbors, our families, and our communities**—who rely on clear, accessible communication to receive essential public services. No one should be denied access to healthcare, emergency assistance, or government resources simply because of a language barrier or disability. **HB1473 ensures that every Maryland resident, regardless of language proficiency or ability, has an equal chance to navigate and benefit from public services that are meant for all.**

With federal protections eroding, Maryland can set a powerful precedent by reaffirming our commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility. This is a moment for leadership. **This is a moment for action.** I urge you to support HB1473 and ensure that no resident of Maryland is left behind.

Thank you for your time and dedication to serving all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Flávia Lima

Interpreter/Translator

HB1473 Language Access Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Flavia Lima

Position: FAV

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Members

Health and Government Operations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

I write today to urge your strong support for **Maryland HB1473, the Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities Act**. In the wake of the recent repeal of Executive Order 13166, which once safeguarded language access at the federal level, Maryland now has a pivotal opportunity—and responsibility—to step up where federal protections have fallen away.

This legislation is not just about policy; it is about **people—our neighbors, our families, and our communities**—who rely on clear, accessible communication to receive essential public services. No one should be denied access to healthcare, emergency assistance, or government resources simply because of a language barrier or disability. **HB1473 ensures that every Maryland resident, regardless of language proficiency or ability, has an equal chance to navigate and benefit from public services that are meant for all.**

With federal protections eroding, Maryland can set a powerful precedent by reaffirming our commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility. **This is a moment for leadership. This is a moment for action.** I urge you to support HB1473 and ensure that no resident of Maryland is left behind.

Thank you for your time and dedication to serving all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Flávia Lima
Interpreter/Translator

HB1473 Language Access Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Flavia Lima

Position: FAV

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Members

Health and Government Operations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

I write today to urge your strong support for **Maryland HB1473, the Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities Act**. In the wake of the recent repeal of Executive Order 13166, which once safeguarded language access at the federal level, Maryland now has a pivotal opportunity—and responsibility—to step up where federal protections have fallen away.

This legislation is not just about policy; it is about **people—our neighbors, our families, and our communities**—who rely on clear, accessible communication to receive essential public services. No one should be denied access to healthcare, emergency assistance, or government resources simply because of a language barrier or disability. **HB1473 ensures that every Maryland resident, regardless of language proficiency or ability, has an equal chance to navigate and benefit from public services that are meant for all.**

With federal protections eroding, Maryland can set a powerful precedent by reaffirming our commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility. **This is a moment for leadership. This is a moment for action.** I urge you to support HB1473 and ensure that no resident of Maryland is left behind.

Thank you for your time and dedication to serving all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Flávia Lima
Interpreter/Translator

HB1473 Language Access Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Flavia Lima

Position: FAV

April 1, 2025

The Honorable Members

Health and Government Operations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

I write today to urge your strong support for **Maryland HB1473, the Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities Act**. In the wake of the recent repeal of Executive Order 13166, which once safeguarded language access at the federal level, Maryland now has a pivotal opportunity—and responsibility—to step up where federal protections have fallen away.

This legislation is not just about policy; it is about **people—our neighbors, our families, and our communities**—who rely on clear, accessible communication to receive essential public services. No one should be denied access to healthcare, emergency assistance, or government resources simply because of a language barrier or disability. **HB1473 ensures that every Maryland resident, regardless of language proficiency or ability, has an equal chance to navigate and benefit from public services that are meant for all.**

With federal protections eroding, Maryland can set a powerful precedent by reaffirming our commitment to equity, inclusion, and accessibility. **This is a moment for leadership. This is a moment for action.** I urge you to support HB1473 and ensure that no resident of Maryland is left behind.

Thank you for your time and dedication to serving all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Flávia Lima
Interpreter/Translator

HB 1473 Testimony to Maryland Senate Committee.pdf

Uploaded by: Garrett Bradford

Position: FAV

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

HB 1473 - Support - EEE - Language and Access Supp

Uploaded by: Henry Bogdan

Position: FAV

April 3, 2025

Testimony on House Bill 1473
State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English
Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities
Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

Maryland Nonprofits is the statewide association representing nonprofit organizations and institutions in every county in Maryland. We urge you to support House Bill 1473.

As passed by the House of Delegates, House Bill 1473 will:

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

Ensuring that state departments, agencies, and programs are accessible to individuals with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency is essential to fostering a just and equitable society. Providing accommodations, such as sign language interpretation, braille, large print, plain language, and other communication supports—along with qualified translators and interpreters—would significantly improve access to public services.

By implementing these measures, state agencies can also meet ADA requirements for effective communication, ensuring that individuals receive the assistance they need without being hindered by language barriers or the availability of a translator.

Our recent experience during and following the Covid-19 pandemic, and now with the uncertainties of federal services due to the massive structural disruptions, layoffs, and funding freezes within federal government agencies, ready and effective access to state agencies and program information is more critical than ever, particularly for persons with disabilities or limited language proficiency.

We urge you to give House Bill 1473 a FAVORABLE Report.

2025-4-3 Jimara Kocik Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Jimara Kocik

Position: FAV

Jimara Kocik

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

HB 1473: State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities

April 3, 2025

Position: Support

(the original Spanish version of this testimony is below)

Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, my name is Jimara Kocik. I live in Howard County, am a Board member of the Autism Society of Maryland, and I am a mom of three children, one of them living with Autism.

I am here today to ask for your support of HB1473, which would provide Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities.

I have had a difficult experience navigating complex processes to understand the special education services, autism waiver services, and DDA services available from the state of Maryland, since my son was diagnosed with autism years ago.

Every family in our state must have the same access to care and high-quality services for their children with disabilities, regardless of the language they speak. The language barrier leaves many families without much-needed services and support. Our state government must have clear plans on how to assist families with limited English, especially for those who have a child with a disability.

The only hope for a lot of us who are alone in a country where no one seems to be in a hurry to help us or our children, is when a nonprofit organization steps in to support and guide us on this journey. That is why I am a volunteer and board member of the Autism Society of Maryland. And, I have learned how to advocate for my son and now I help others who have children with special needs, while, at the same time learning a new language.

I have been learning English since I arrived in the United States years ago, but English is a very complex language and I have months and years ahead of me to master new skills and fluency. Should that mean that my son should not get the full array of services for which he qualifies until I learn English well enough? Do you think it is fair for children born in the United States to be denied services because the family cannot communicate adequately in English to advocate for them? What happens if, in the end, they never master the language? Does that mean their children or young adults should be denied the services available to English speakers?

Maryland has a large population of families who have limited English proficiency and who have children and young adults in need of services right now; however, these families cannot access the information, forms, resources, and guidance in our state. Sometimes a form is in Spanish but not the instructions. Or the families call with questions about the Autism Waiver and there is nobody in that office that speaks Spanish. Their access to services is blocked.

EVERY child in Maryland should receive equitable services that are high quality and delivered on time. And EVERY family should have easy access to those services through the State of Maryland. Please help us ensure that 100% of our families and children with disabilities have access to the resources and staff to help them navigate those services in their language. I urge you to support HB1473.

Jimara Kocik

jimarac@yahoo.com

Wife, Mom, Community Advocate

Board Member Autism Society of Maryland

Miembros del Comité de Salud y Operaciones Gubernamentales, mi nombre es Jimara Kocik. Vivo en el condado de Howard, soy miembro de la junta de la Sociedad de Autismo de Maryland y soy madre de tres hijos, uno de ellos con autismo.

Estoy aquí hoy para pedir su apoyo a la HB1473, que brindaría acceso igualitario a los servicios públicos para personas con dominio limitado del inglés y personas con discapacidades.

He tenido una experiencia difícil al navegar por procesos complejos para comprender los servicios de educación especial, los servicios de exención por autismo y los servicios de la DDA disponibles en el estado de Maryland, desde cuando mi hijo le diagnosticaron autismo hace años.

Todas las familias de nuestro estado deben tener el mismo acceso a la atención y a servicios de alta calidad para sus hijos con discapacidades, independientemente del idioma que hablen. La barrera del idioma deja a muchas familias sin servicios y apoyos necesarios. Nuestro gobierno estatal debe tener planes claros sobre cómo ayudar a las familias con un inglés limitado, especialmente para aquellas que tienen un hijo con una discapacidad.

La única esperanza para muchos de nosotros que estamos solos en un país donde nadie parece tener prisa por ayudarnos a nosotros o a nuestros hijos, es que una organización sin fines de lucro intervenga para apoyarnos y guiarnos en este viaje. Es por eso que soy voluntaria y miembro de la junta directiva de la Sociedad de Autismo de Maryland. Y he aprendido a defender a mi hijo y ahora ayudo a otras personas que

tienen hijos con necesidades especiales, mientras que, al mismo tiempo, aprendo un nuevo idioma.

He estado aprendiendo inglés desde que llegué a los Estados Unidos hace años, pero el inglés es un idioma muy complejo y tengo meses y años por delante para dominar nuevas habilidades y fluidez. ¿Eso debería significar que mi hijo no debería recibir la gama completa de servicios para los que califica hasta que aprenda inglés lo suficientemente bien? ¿Cree que es justo que a los niños nacidos en los Estados Unidos se les nieguen servicios porque la familia no puede comunicarse adecuadamente en inglés para defenderlos? ¿Qué sucede si, al final, nunca dominan el idioma? ¿Eso significa que a sus hijos o adultos jóvenes se les deben negar los servicios disponibles para los que hablen inglés?

Maryland tiene una gran población de familias que tienen un dominio limitado del inglés y que tienen hijos y adultos jóvenes que necesitan servicios en este momento; sin embargo, estas familias no pueden acceder a la información, los formularios, los recursos y la orientación en nuestro estado. A veces, un formulario está en español, pero no las instrucciones. O las familias llaman con preguntas sobre la exención para el autismo y no hay nadie en esa oficina que hable español. Su acceso a los servicios está bloqueado.

TODOS los niños de Maryland deben recibir servicios equitativos que sean de alta calidad y se presten a tiempo. Y TODAS las familias deben tener fácil acceso a esos servicios a través del estado de Maryland. Ayúdenos a garantizar que el 100% de nuestras familias y niños con discapacidades tengan acceso a los recursos y al personal para ayudarlos a navegar por esos servicios en su idioma. Le insto a que apoye la HB1473.

Jimara Kocik

jimarac@yahoo.com

Esposa, madre, defensora de la comunidad

Miembro de la junta directiva de la Sociedad de Autismo de Maryland

Health Care for the Homeless - HB 1473 FAV - Lang

Uploaded by: Joanna Diamond

Position: FAV



HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY

FAVORABLE

HB 1473 – State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

April 4, 2025

Health Care for the Homeless supports HB 1473, which would strengthen Maryland's Language Access Law by:

- Requiring state agencies, departments, and programs to establish a language access plan and notify individuals with limited English proficiency ("LEP") about their right to free language assistance services
- Designating the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs as the oversight, monitoring, investigation and enforcement body for Maryland's language access law
- Requiring state agencies, departments, and programs to report annually on their language access plan and budget, language assistance services provided to community members, and language access complaints received; and
- Providing an annual appropriation to the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to support their existing work as well as this new role

Health Care for the Homeless clients often require language assistance to reasonably access the public programs and services contemplated by this bill. These public programs are integral to the care of our clients.

Health Care for the Homeless Clients Need Language Access to Obtain Public Benefits and Services

While Maryland and federal law require certain state agencies, departments, and programs to provide meaningful access to their program, services, and activities to individuals with LEP by providing timely and free language assistance services, not all state agencies are consistently meeting these requirements. This has led to clients being turned away from state agency offices and an inability to apply for or maintain public benefits. Health Care for the Homeless clients rely on these benefits in order to meet their basic needs. Moreover, Health Care for the Homeless collaborates with and relies on state agencies to provide the services that are outside the scope of our clinical care. Without being able to reliably access these additional services, the care we provide becomes more complex and difficult. For instance, if a client experiences food insecurity but is unable to access food assistance, that client's care becomes more complicated due to the hunger they experience. Make no mistake: if that client is an individual with LEP, language assistance is absolutely necessary.

The systems in which our clients operate for their mere survival are challenging. Housing instability compounds the barriers that people face in every facet of their life – from their health to their employment to their child's education. The various public services and programs that our clients have to navigate in order to meet their basic needs are already complex, and that difficulty is compounded exponentially by housing instability. If within these already complex, confusing, and piecemeal

systems, a client is then attempting to access these benefits in a language inaccessible to them, those services become virtually impossible to obtain.

The Time to Act is Now

In 2020, the Trump administration put forward new regulations that stripped important, long-standing civil rights for individuals with limited English proficiency from a key federal antidiscrimination law, Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act. Although the Biden administration took steps in 2024 to restore and strengthen these protections, these rights are at serious risk of being stripped again under the current Administration. We have no reason to believe that the Trump Administration will not rollback these protections once again.

But we don't have to wait for federal language access protections to be rolled back. The federal Administration recently rescinded the nearly 25-year-old Executive Order 13166, which required federal agencies to provide free language assistance services to individuals with LEP. We must protect Marylanders from further changes at the federal level.

Language access is a human right. We urge Maryland to do what is right and just and issue a favorable report on HB 1473.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.

Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.

For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.

DRMtestimony.HB1473.Senate.pdf

Uploaded by: Leslie Margolis

Position: FAV



Empowering People to Lead Systemic Change
The Protection and Advocacy System for the State of Maryland

1500 Union Ave., Suite 2000, Baltimore, MD 21211
Phone: 410-727-6352 | Fax: 410-727-6389
DisabilityRightsMD.org

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 1473

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

April 3, 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is Maryland's Protection & Advocacy agency, mandated to advance the rights of people with disabilities statewide. DRM has been representing people with disabilities in a range of legal matters for nearly 50 years and understands well the challenges faced by our constituency when they are unable to access state agency assistance promptly and effectively because of language barriers. Because all of DRM's clients have disabilities and a number of DRM's clients speak languages other than English, we strongly support House Bill 1473. This bill, if enacted, would require language access for individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities.

For many individuals, the process of contacting a government agency, navigating a voicemail system, and getting an actual human being to address their question or concern can be a Sisyphean task, especially if the individual finally does reach a person and cannot communicate with them. Additionally, individuals may lose or be denied benefits or services because they receive time-sensitive communications, such as appeal rights and deadlines, but cannot read them because they are provided in a language or mode that renders them inaccessible to the person.

DRM appreciates that House Bill 1473 takes a flexible approach to communication accessibility, recognizing that individuals with disabilities use various methods of communication. By broadly defining language assistance services to include sign language, Braille, TDD/TT/TTY, large print, plain language, and "other communication accommodations," the bill allows for a wide range of supports and encourages state agencies to take a more understanding and responsive approach. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting individual communication preferences, increasing the likelihood that people will receive the support they need in a way that works best for them. For these reasons, DRM supports House Bill 1473. Contact: Leslie Seid Margolis at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or 410-370-5730.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Seid Margolis
Managing Attorney and Policy Counsel

HB1473 Testimony Crossover.pdf

Uploaded by: Madelin Martinez

Position: FAV

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:

Mayra Loera, Program Manager, Client Services/Building Hope Dundalk Support Center
Madelin Martinez, Assistant Director of Advocacy

EACtestimony.HB1473.Senate (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Megan Jones

Position: FAV

Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 1473

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

April 3, 2025

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities (EAC) is a coalition of nearly 50 organizations and individuals concerned with education policy for students with disabilities in Maryland. The EAC supports House Bill 1473, which would, if enacted, require state government agencies to ensure that state government agencies provide equal language access to individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities. Such access for individuals with disabilities includes sign languages, Braille, TDD, large print, plain language and other communication accommodations. EAC members represent or work with many children with disabilities whose families do not speak English and have a difficult time navigating government services because, too often, agency staff do not secure qualified interpreters to enable on-demand access to agency personnel. For example, state agency personnel may turn away a person with limited English proficiency or a person who is deaf and needs an American Sign Language interpreter. Without access to on-demand interpreting and translating, an individual may be unable to apply for safety net services intended to support low income individuals and their families. Individuals may be able to access part of an agency's website but not all of it, losing access to important information, such as guidance documents or resources. Individuals may also be terminated from critical benefits when letters containing instructions and deadlines are sent in English or when individuals call an agency to get clarification or more information about benefits, appeals, or timelines and the agency does not make an interpreter available.

Many of the families EAC members represent or work with have experienced barriers in their efforts to participate in their children's education. Parents have attended IEP meetings with no interpreters or interpreters who cannot competently interpret special education terminology. Parents have tried to contact school system transportation departments to report that their child's bus has not come but have been hung up on because they do not speak English. Parents have found it difficult to attend orientation or back to school meetings when interpreting is not available. The frustration and isolation families feel when they experience these barriers in their everyday lives are only compounded when they need to contact state agencies about services and do not have language access. The EAC supports House Bill 1473 because it will make state government agencies accessible to all Marylanders.

Education Advocacy Coalition Testimony: House Bill 1473

March 11, 2025

Page Two

Contact: Leslie Seid Margolis at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or 443-692-2505.

Respectfully submitted,

Rene Averitt-Sanzone, The Parents' Place of Maryland

Linda Barton, MSED, Education Consultant

Beth Benevides, Autism Society of Maryland, Co-Chair, Education Advocacy Coalition

Ellen A. Callegary, Attorney (Retired)

Melanie Carlos, xMinds (Partnership for Extraordinary Minds)

Stephanie Carr, S.L. Carr Education Consultants, LLC

Rich Ceruolo, Parent

Michelle R. Davis, M.Ed., ABCs for Life Success

Kalman Hettleman, Independent Advocate

Megan Durand Horvath, M.Ed., Abilities Network

Rachel London, Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Leslie Seid Margolis, Disability Rights Maryland, Co-Chair, Education Advocacy Coalition

Monica Martinez, Martinez Advocacy

Beth Nolan, MAT, Education Team Allies

Ellen O'Neill, Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Center

Rebecca Rienzi, Pathfinders for Autism

Ronza Othman, National Federation of the Blind of Maryland/Maryland Parents of Blind
Children

Ronetta Stanley, M.Ed., Loud Voices Together

Guy Stephens, Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint

2025-4-3 HB1473 Equity Coalition EEE.pdf

Uploaded by: Rene Averitt-Sanzone

Position: FAV

Maryland Equity Coalition for People with Disabilities Member Organizations

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

HB 1473: State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities

April 3, 2025

Position: Support

On behalf of the following 30 member organizations of the Maryland Equity Coalition for People with Disabilities, we support HB1473, which will require state agencies to create and enforce language access plans, providing translated materials and interpretation services, with built-in mechanisms for compliance monitoring and improvement. Language access plans, a key component of the bill, will ensure that state agencies operate effectively.

Amigo Care ABA

The Arc Prince George's County

Ascenda Foundation

Autism Society of Maryland

AVANZOS Educational and Behavioral Services

Brown on the Spectrum

Chinese Culture and Community Services Center, Inc.

Choice and Control, Inc

Community Options, Inc

Disability Rights Maryland

Down Syndrome Network of Montgomery County

Ethiopian Eritrean Special Needs Community

Jubilee Association of Maryland

Maryland Coalition of Families

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Maryland Inclusive Housing

Montgomery County Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Inc

Parents' Place of Maryland

Partnership for Extraordinary Minds

People On the Go Maryland

Potomac Community Resources, Inc.

Promoting Meaningful Interaction and Social Engagement (PROMISE)

Rock Creek Foundation

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, Office of Deaf and Disabilities Ministries

Self Directed Advocacy Network of Maryland

Special Education Equal Development Society (SEEDS)

Speech Garden

SupAbilities

The Treatment and Learning Centers

University of Maryland College Park, Special Education Program

As organizations committed to supporting individuals with disabilities, **we understand the significant impact of language barriers on accessing crucial state services.** In a 2023 report, members of our coalition highlighted demographic disparities among Hispanic individuals with disabilities in a letter to state leaders¹. The data revealed inequitable access for Hispanic people to vocational rehabilitation services and services at the Maryland Department of Health (ex: Autism Waiver services, housing opportunities, and Developmental Disabilities Administration's Home and Community Based Services waiver programs).

Our coalition member organizations have experienced a similar lack of access for other immigrant communities due to language barriers. We share **the following examples of challenges faced by individuals with disabilities due to inadequate language access:**

- Despite completing applications in Spanish and requesting communication in Spanish, families are still sent an eligibility determination letter in English. This creates unfair access issues and an administrative burden on these families applying for services.
- State agencies have incorrectly assessed needs for people with disabilities who speak languages other than English. Recently, DDA incorrectly assessed the level of care for a person who is Ethiopian American. The health risk-screening interview was conducted in English rather than in Amharic.
- Public information is not available in other languages, despite providing time sensitive and essential information to the community. The lack of interpretation services at public information sessions prevents individuals with disabilities from accessing essential resources in a timely and equitable way.
- Language access for people who are part of the Deaf community that use American Sign Language and a community that speaks a language other than English struggle to get the support they need. For example, the recent Supreme Court ruling in *Perez v. Sturgis Public Schools* found that the public school failed to language access in American Sign Language and Spanish for the student who was Deaf and Mexican American.

The Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency Bill addresses these challenges by mandating state agencies to develop Language Access Plans and creating compliance mechanisms. Language Access Plans aim to eliminate communication barriers and foster inclusivity for individuals with disabilities, regardless of linguistic background. Incorporating compliance mechanisms within the bill is crucial to ensure accountability and remove persistent barriers.

In addition, under the current federal administration, people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency are facing new attacks on language access protections. Federal employees with disabilities are reporting not being granted workplace accommodations for language access, in violation of Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Americans with Disability Act. The National Association for the Deaf has also already requested the White House reinstate American Sign Language interpreting services for all news briefings and related events, threatening legal action if

¹ <https://www.jubileemd.org/download/enriqueciendo-vidas-advocacy-letter-october-2023-english-language/>

they do not comply. Spanish webpages for federal agencies, like FEMA and the White House, have been shut down in response to executive orders. It remains unclear what protections will be in place under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 given the changes at the U.S. Department of Justice. The Trump Administration has gutted the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights reducing its ability to investigate discrimination claims. Finally, on March 1, 2025, the current administration issued an executive order, "Designating English as the Official Language of the United States." This order revokes the protection and support offered by previous administrations, such as Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency."

Now, more than ever, we need to support access for people with disabilities in our community. Given Maryland's diversity, strong language access in state agencies is essential to meet the varied language needs of its population. **We support HB 1473 as a step toward advancing equity and accessibility for all Marylanders.**

For more information, please contact Rosie Lily, Director of Engagement at The Parents' Place of Maryland: rosie@ppmd.org, (410) 768-9100 extension 107.

HB1473 crossfile FWA - State Government - Equal Ac

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FWA

04/02/2025

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703

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>

2025 HB1473 Testimony Against 2025-04-03.pdf

Uploaded by: Alan Lang

Position: UNF

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.

Alan Lang
45 Marys Mount Road
Harwood, Maryland 20776
Legislative District 30B
410-336-9745
April 3, 2025

HB1473- State Board- LOI- Crossover.pdf

Uploaded by: Madeline Houck

Position: INFO

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment

BILL: HB1473 -State Government-Equal Access to public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities

DATE: April 03, 2025

POSITION: Information

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is sending this letter of information on **HB1473 - State Government-Equal Access to public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities**. This bill alters provisions of law relating to equal access of public services for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) to include individuals with disabilities (IWD); establishes certain requirements for equal access to public services for certain state agencies, including developing and updating a detailed language access plan biennially; requires the Governor's Office on Immigrant Affairs to oversee, monitor, investigate, and enforce certain provisions of law; requires State departments, agencies, and programs to implement certain provisions of law on or before certain dates; and generally relating to equal access to public services for individuals with LEP and disabilities.

Current Practice

MSDE, through its divisions, routinely interacts with individuals with LEP and disabilities. MSDE provides strategic direction, leadership, policy making, resource allocation and engagement and advocacy to 24 local education agencies, interacts with and encounters over 7,000 childcare providers, thousands of participants in pre-employment transition services and adult vocational rehabilitation services, Social Security disability determination applicants, and innumerable constituents, including those who are LEP and IWD, statewide.

MSDE adheres to the state and federal regulations that ensure equal access to its programs and services. Specifically, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Md. Code, State Government § 10-1101 through § 10-1105 require state agencies to provide meaningful language access to the public who are LEP. Titles I and II of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title 20 of the State Government Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, and the Maryland Information Technology Nonvisual Access (MD IT NVA) Regulatory Standards require provisions to provide effective communication to individuals with disabilities. Governor's Executive Order 01.01. 2007.16 – Code of Fair Employment Practices states, *“in performing services to the public, employees of this State will not discriminate against the public or individuals for any reason prohibited by law, nor shall they authorize the use of State facilities in the furtherance of any unlawfully discriminatory purpose or by any organization which unlawfully discriminates in its membership or policies”*

MSDE publishes its non-discrimination statement on its website, along with an ADA/AA Policy and Complaint Procedure and allows website translation into approximately 100 languages. Individuals interested in filing a grievance about ineffective communication within MSDE's programs and services may contact MSDE's Office of Equity Assurance and Compliance.

In addition, Md. Code Ann., Educ. 26-704 prohibits discrimination in education. Failure to provide meaningful language access, absent undue hardship, to individuals who are LEP and IWD may be discriminatory. Md. Code Ann., Educ. 26-705 currently permits individuals to file a complaint with the State Superintendent alleging discrimination on said protected categories against a county board, public prekindergarten program, public primary or secondary school, nonpublic school programs that receive State funds. MSDE also publishes its Non-Discrimination in Education Complaint Procedure on its website.

MSDE also trains and provides its staff with written guidance on providing accessible services to individuals who are LEP and IWD. MSDE also has an accessibility division to ensure its documents are compliant with applicable accessibility regulations.

Without the revisions cited in HB1473, MSDE has expended approximately \$226,000.00 in effective communication services for IWD and \$175,000.00 in foreign language interpretation and translation services for LEP populations within approximately 18 months. Specifically, for Fiscal Year 2024, MSDE spent \$111,654.18 in American Sign Language, Live Captioning, and Document Remediation. For Fiscal Year 2025, MSDE spent \$114,233.25 for the same services thus far. Regarding Foreign Language Interpretation and Translation services, MSDE has spent \$174,417.43 for Fiscal Year 2024 and \$50,408.13 for Fiscal Year 2025 thus far.

HB1473

HB1473 will impact divisions within MSDE responsible for licensing and certification. MSDE's Division of Educator Effectiveness (DEE) certifies teachers and other professional personnel; oversees the preparation of educator candidates; and approves the educational programs of nonpublic schools. *Unless there were changes to the exemptions for translating "vital documents" in HB1473, multiple applications overseen by DEE would need to be altered.*

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.

Moreover, generally, the State has not grouped IWD with LEP populations. Currently, LEP persons are protected under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and IWD are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act. The distinction between the groups has resulted in applications and examinations not considered "vital documents" from being translated into foreign languages; however, due to separate legal requirements for IWD, state agencies have been required to provide reasonable

accommodations, as necessary, to provide equal access to examinations and assessments, as required under applicable laws.

The distinction between LEP and disability protection laws has also resulted in state agencies procuring separate contracts for ASL and foreign language services. This adds an additional operational expense as staff are required to contact multiple vendors for various services although the services are available from the contracted vendor. This impacts the productivity and operational needs of the agency and can delay effective communication with the public.

The State of Maryland has a statewide Foreign Language Interpretation and Translation Services (FLITS) contract managed by the Maryland Department of General Services (DGS) for foreign language interpretation and translation services and previously had a Visual Communications Services contract for state agencies to use for ASL, captioning and other services assisting those with disabilities. It could be helpful to state agencies if DGS re-introduced and expanded this contract to include large print, braille and plain language translation as it would streamline the process, reduce expenses and operational challenges, and promote consistency statewide among agencies.

We respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **HB1473**. Please contact Delinda Johnson Blake, delinda.blake1@maryland.gov for any additional information.

HB1473.DDCouncil.LOI.CF.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Dolamore

Position: INFO



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

HB 1473: State Government - Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities

April 3, 2025

Position: Letter of Information

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (Council) creates change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. From this perspective, the Council knows and understands that public services must be accessible so everyone can benefit.

Many people in Maryland use a language other than English to communicate and understand information. For example, according to the Migration Policy Institute, among Marylanders ages 18-64, 23.2% speak a language other than English and 9.3% speak English less than “very well”. The Maryland Deaf Community Center reports that about 19% of people in Maryland are Deaf and hard of hearing, some of whom use American Sign Language or other signed languages to communicate. There are also many people with disabilities who use assistive technologies to communicate and understand information such as people who are nonverbal that use ACC devices (augmentative and alternative communication devices) or the Blind who use screen readers.

Maryland offers many public services across the State. Those services are hard to navigate particularly for Marylanders with limited English proficiency. For example, in Maryland, 10.6% of the adult population speaks Spanishⁱ and 12.6% of adults identify as Hispanic or Latinoⁱⁱ, but less than 2% of the people accessing vocational rehabilitation services and services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration are Hispanic or Latino.ⁱⁱⁱ

This bill will complement work already in progress by many state agencies and strengthen the ability of all Marylanders to access public services. We want to highlight two important initiatives:

1. **The Maryland Department of Information Technology, the Maryland Department of Disabilities, and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council are collaborating on the Maryland Plain Language Initiative (Exec. Order No. 01.01.2024.25).** This effort will establish Plain Language Standards for the State of Maryland. The goal is to make all written communication by state agencies, including websites, accessible to the broadest general public audience possible.

2. **The Maryland Vehicle Administration collaborated with the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council to re-write their driver's permit test in Plain Language.** This allowed MVA to translate the tests into 17 other languages including American Sign Language. In the first 2 months the new test was offered, 15% more Marylanders passed. These results show how increasing language access improves the public experience due to tests that focus on content knowledge versus test-taking skills. The results also show how access improves government services by being more efficient with the resources available to the public.

Contact: Stephanie Dolamore, Deputy Director: SDolamore@md-council.org

ⁱ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/MD>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST040223>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://jubileemd.org/download/enriqueciendo-vidas-advocacy-letter-october-2023-english-language/?wpdmdl=20971&refresh=6532c07c2d8c01697824892>