

Subject: Favorable with an Amendment HB1473 Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals With Limited English Proficiency and Individuals With Disabilities

Date: March 11, 2025

From: National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

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To: House Health And Government Operations Committee

The definition of equal access should be broadened as follows;

Amendment #1: On page 4, line 12, before “and other communication accommodations,” add “the ability to receive, use, and manipulate information and operate controls necessary to access and use information technology, including by nonvisual means, so that a person with disabilities can access the same services as a person without disabilities with substantially equivalent ease of use.”

Amendment #2: On page 5, line 30, after “benefits” and before “provided by,” add “including websites and forms.”

The definition of the language access plan needs to be broadened as follows;

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the House Health And Government Operations Committee to vote in favor of the amended bill HB1473, a bill that will provide equal access to government information for those with limited English proficiency or disabilities, including the blind and deaf. These amendments are necessary if the bill is to reach its goal of equal access. Most agencies and departments in state government have websites which contain a great deal of information. The forms on these websites must be user-friendly and must be accessible to be filled out by all.

One of the greatest problems that blind people have is access to information. Giving the responsibility of planning and administering the provision of information to the groups specified in the bill will ensure that the information will be provided. The Office of Immigrant Affairs is the correct place to give this responsibility and the bill will also provide the necessary funding to accomplish the goals. Departments, agencies and boards will report to the Office of Immigrant Affairs on their progress which is another accountability step necessary for the success of the program.

Please vote in favor of the amended HB1473. Give those with limited English proficiency, including persons with disabilities, access to the information that they will need to participate in community life.