



**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**

**House Health and Government Operations Committee**  
**March 11, 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](http://www.hchmd.org).*