



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.

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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.

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