

Education Advocacy Coalition

for Students with Disabilities

HOUSE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 1473

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

March 11, 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

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