

March 7, 2025

Testimony on HB 1473
State Government – Equal Access to Public Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Individuals with Disabilities
Health and Government Operations

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 1473, which would help ensure equal access to public services for individuals with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency.

According to the most recent census data, Maryland is the most diverse state on the East coast, and the third most diverse state in the nation. We know that more than a million Marylanders speak a language other than English in their homes. We also know that our communities benefit when our leaders invest in ensuring public services are available to all eligible citizens, regardless of their ability to read or speak English.

Even Marylanders who speak English as a first language can find it difficult to access the public services they need – and it can be even more challenging and confusing for voters with limited English proficiency or a disability. HB 1473 would rectify this issue by requiring certain state agencies to develop a language access plan to provide equal access to public services and other benefits for eligible individuals who need language assistance, at no cost to the individual. The bill also requires the translation of vital documents into any language spoken by limited English proficient population that constitutes 0.5 percent of the state’s population. This will help ensure that no one is barred from accessing a necessary public service due to a language barrier.

With the abundance of diversity present within our state, it is critical that legislators take steps to remove any barriers to ensure public services are accessible to all. Extending assistance to any language-minority group that satisfies the proposed threshold will create stronger communities by helping to build trust in our state institutions and increase their accessibility for all citizens, regardless of where they came from or what language they are most comfortable speaking.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report on HB 1473.