



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Caron Watkins Interim Director, Office of Equity & Civil Rights Interim Chief Equity Officer
ANALYST	Zachary Wellman Equity Policy Analyst, Office of Equity & Civil Rights
DATE	October 23, 2024
SUBJECT	OECR Report on Baltimore City Council Bill 24-0584 Baltimore City Government Entities - Language Access

OECR POSITION: Favorable

SUMMARY OF LEGISLATION

The Office of Equity & Civil Rights (OECR) has reviewed and is herein reporting on City Council Bill 24-0584 – *Baltimore City Government Entities - Language Access*. This is a language access ordinance for Baltimore residents who are Limited English Proficient (LEP). The ordinance is an administration initiative led by the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA).

The bill seeks to accomplish the following:

- Require Baltimore City Government Entities to provide LEP individuals with access to all offered services and programs.
- Require Entities to appoint at least one language access liaison.
- Require the language access liaison and the director of an Entity to collaborate with MIMA to create a Language Access Plan
- Outline the contents of the Language Access Plan.
- Require the Language Access Plan to be made available publicly.
- Require the Language Access Plan be updated and submitted to MIMA by January 1st of every even numbered year.
- Require Entities to file a report on the Language Access Plan with MIM by October 31st each year.
- Outline the role of MIMA in providing oversight, assistance, and coordination of Language Access Liaisons, Plans, and Reports.
- Provide for an effective date for the ordinance of 180 days after it is enacted.

The bill accomplishes this by adding Article 1 - Mayor, City Council, and Municipal Agencies, Subtitle 53 - Language Access to the Baltimore City Code.

EQUITY ANALYSIS

Council Bill 24-0584 intends to expand access to city services and programs for LEP individuals who speak Citywide Designated Languages (to be established by MIMA under the ordinance). Baltimore City is home to 57,000 individuals who speak a language other than English at home and 20,000 individuals who speak English less than “very well;” therefore, approximately 13.75% of Baltimore residents are considered LEP. Council Bill 24-0584 would empower MIMA, in collaboration with all City Entities, to make considerable strides in improving the equity of the City’s growing immigrant and LEP population. This bill will achieve this by establishing a process in which documents, services, and programs that are traditionally inaccessible due to English exclusivity are made accessible to LEP residents.

OECR employees interact with LEP individuals on a daily basis, whether through complaints, calls, site visits, community outreach, or other in-person services administered on behalf of its numerous boards and commissions, such as the Police Accountability Board and Wage Commission. A Language Access Liaison is an essential part of ensuring equitable service of residents in City Entities like the OECR. This is because they function as the first point of contact for agency employees regarding language access-related issues, vastly improving the depth and scope of services City employees are empowered to provide residents. Liaisons are also responsible for establishing a tailored Language Access Plan and administering language access training to other agency employees, ensuring that city employees are prepared to equitably service LEP individuals who are traditionally excluded or forgotten.

Out of faith in the equitable impact language access has on the daily lives of immigrants and LEP residents, the OECR has already worked with MIMA to take steps toward achieving what Bill 24-0584 intends to codify. The OECR appointed a Language Access Liaison and communicated to its staff the services the office provides to LEP residents through the Liaison. Additionally, the OECR Language Access Liaison and director worked with MIMA to establish a Language Access Plan as of March 2020; upon the passage of this bill, the OECR is committed to collaborating with MIMA to update the Plan. Finally, in support of the efforts outlined in Bill 24-0584 to require all City produced documents be accessible to LEP residents, the OECR has translated the following documents into at least one most spoken non-English languages in Baltimore (Spanish, French, Chinese, Arabic, or Korean):

- Workers Right to Fair Pay brochure (Spanish)
- Notice to Employees, Living Wage (Spanish)
- Prevailing Wage Rates (Spanish)
- Fair Housing- General Brochure (Spanish, French, Chinese, Arabic, and Korean)

Without equitable language access, LEP residents are more vulnerable to labor exploitation, poor service delivery, workplace/school discrimination, and police misconduct, all of which the OECR is on the frontline of combatting.

CONCLUSION

The OECR believes there is significant equitable intent behind Council Bill 24-0584. It also believes that the bill's impact will result in measurable improvements to Baltimore residents' equity by prioritizing the inclusion of LEP residents in the function City Entities. As such, the Office of Equity & Civil Rights respectfully requests a **favorable** committee report on City Council Bill 24-0584.

Respectfully Submitted,



Caron Watkins

Interim Director, Office of Equity & Civil Rights