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TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Corren Johnson, Director – Department of Transportation
DATE	September 23, 2024
SUBJECT	24-0584 Baltimore City Government Entities - Language Access

Position: No Objection

Introduction

For the purpose of requiring a certain Baltimore government entity to appoint a language access liaison and adopt a Language Access Plan; requiring a Baltimore government entity to provide language access services to specified individuals; establishing certain reporting requirements; defining certain terms; providing for a special effective date; and generally relating to the provision of language access services by Baltimore government entities.

DOT Analysis

Council Bill 24-0584 would establish language accessibility requirements for City government entities which receive grants and provide public services, with DOT included. The Department provides a breadth of services on public right-of-way, including sidewalk and alley repair, traffic calming, illegal parking enforcement, and abandoned vehicle removal, among others. Due to its large portfolio, the DOT processes a substantial volume of service requests, inquiries, and complaints on a daily basis. These requests are mainly processed in English, the language most commonly spoken in the City. As a result, some residents are unable to access necessary services without assistance or translation services. Improving language accessibility, therefore, could help to connect these residents to City services.

In implementing the legislation, it is important that the entire service process is accounted for. A large share of DOT requests is placed through the online 311 portal, which operates primarily in English. A lack of language options may discourage many residents from submitting important concerns, limiting the DOT's awareness of important issues within their communities. Additionally, a lack of proficiency in other languages may limit the DOT's ability to follow up with residents when



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additional information is needed. While these circumstances may be infrequent due to the nature of the Department's work, gaps in communication can arise as a result of language barriers. Interagency translation and interpreting services may help to bridge the gaps between the Department's customer care staff and residents with limited English proficiency.

Conclusion

The Department foresees only minor fiscal and operational concerns as a result of this legislation. Therefore, recognizing the need for improved language accessibility, the Department has no objection to the advancement of Council Bill 24-0584.