




CITY OF BALTIMORE  
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

<b>TO</b>	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
<b>FROM</b>	Alice Kennedy, Housing Commissioner 
<b>DATE</b>	October 23, 2024
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>24-0584 Baltimore City Government Entities - Language Access</b>

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The Honorable President and  
Members of the City Council  
City Hall, Room 400

10/23/24

**Position: Favorable**

### Introduction

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Bill 24-0584 Baltimore City Government Entities - Language Access 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.

If enacted, City Council Bill 24-0584 would require all Baltimore City government departments and offices along with any organization administering publicly funded programs that deliver direct public services to appoint a designated language access liaison and adopt a Language Access Plan. That plan must be developed in coordination with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA), the given entity's Director, and the entity's designated language access liaison. Each entity will file an annual report with MIMA and the Department of Legislative Reference detailing the preparation and implementation of their Language Access Plan. If approved, this Bill will go into effect the 180<sup>th</sup> day after the date it is enacted.

### DHCD Analysis

DHCD is dedicated to taking steps to providing meaningful access to City services for all people, including those with limited English proficiency. Nearly 57,000 individuals (10.3% of Baltimore's population) speak a language other than English at home and Over 20,000 of those individuals speak English less than "very well". Individuals who do not speak English as their

primary language and have limited ability to speak, write, or understand English are considered to have Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Currently, the top five languages spoken by LEP individuals in Baltimore are: Spanish (9,659), Arabic, (1,622), Chinese (1,515), French (1,451), and Korean (658).

DHCD currently undertakes a multi-pronged approach to make our public facing services and materials available to LEP residents of Baltimore City. Those efforts include the provision of translated materials such as brochures, applications, records and other forms, along with interpretation and transcripts of certain meetings. Additionally, we provide Language Service access through our Baltimore City Interagency Telephonic Interpretation Account and our bilingual employees that are willing to be called on if necessary. DHCD also provides services for meetings held in communities with high concentrations of LEP individuals and has procured translation services for on-site support as needed.

Notably, DHCD posts signage notifying LEP individuals in the following locations:

- Service counters for permits, zoning, plans development and review
- Agency reception areas
- Agency public meeting rooms

Additionally, our agency uses the following strategies to notify LEP individuals of available services:

- Social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube
- Brochures and Flyers at community meetings/public gatherings
- Door hangers

We also utilize the *Neighborly* platform, an online application portal, to promote several important programs in multiple languages including Community Catalyst Grants, Homeownership Incentives, Housing Preservation Programs, Housing Upgrades to Benefit Seniors (HUBS), Tax Sale Exemption Program, Emergency Mortgage & Housing Assistance Program and AHTF – New Construction/Preservation of Existing Rental Housing.

As part of a cohort of City agencies identified to create a Language Access Guidance document pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights act of 1964, DHCD has already been working with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) on the translation of identified vital documents. DHCD also maintains a permanent Equity Officer to continue to advance this work. We look forward to working with MIMA to continue the meaningful goal of increasing language access for all residents of Baltimore City.

## Conclusion

DHCD respectfully requests a **favorable** report on City Council Bill 24-0584.