

# **The Language Access for All Coalition**

## **An Act Relative to Language Access and Inclusion**

**S.2040 (Sen. DiDomenico) / H.3199 (Rep. Madaro)**



The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare our Commonwealth's inability to provide desperately needed information and services in languages other than English. **With one of the most linguistically diverse states in the country**, Massachusetts must build the capacity of public-facing state agencies to meet the language access needs of an increasingly diverse population. Non-English speaking residents must have equal access to public health information, education, unemployment assistance, healthcare, housing, and other crucial services, especially those related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **The Language Access and Inclusion Act would:**

#### **1. Ensure that state agencies effectively communicate with a diverse Commonwealth.**

The bill would require all public-facing agencies, and the outside service providers they rely on, to offer **interpretation services and translate vital documents** for non-English speakers—such as notices, forms, and applications. Everyone must have access to the information they need to receive critical services, especially during a pandemic.



Nearly 1 in 10 Massachusetts residents are considered limited English proficient

#### **2. Standardize and enforce robust language access plans.**

Existing language access plans, policies, and protocols vary widely from agency to agency, and many are not implemented. This bill would provide **minimum standards** for such plans—and give them **the force of law**, under the auspices of the Office of Access and Opportunity within the Executive Office for Administration and Finance. It would also require regular data collection so that state agencies know the linguistic needs of the populations they serve.

#### **3. Ensure adequate staffing to meet language access needs.**

The bill requires public-facing agencies to employ **state-wide and regional language access coordinators** whose only responsibilities would be to develop, implement, and train staff regarding agency language access plans and protocols.

#### **4. Create a stakeholder advisory board to assist state agencies in compliance.**

This bill would create a **language access advisory board** that includes representatives of non-English speaking communities, the deaf or hard-of-hearing community, community groups and legal service providers from regions across the state, as well as state lawmakers, to partner with state agencies in developing and implementing the law by providing technical assistance and support.

#### **5. Create mechanisms for phased-in implementation.**

This bill would initially apply to **nine essential public-facing state agencies** [1] that provide services such as healthcare, housing, education, and childcare, before expanding to include other executive offices.

**Questions?** Contact: Iris Coloma-Gaines at [icoloma-gaines@mlri.org](mailto:icoloma-gaines@mlri.org) or tel: (617) 357-0700 Ext. 317; or Melanie Rush at [melanie@massappleseed.org](mailto:melanie@massappleseed.org) or tel: (617) 482-8686.

[1] MassHealth, the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Early Education and Care, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Transitional Assistance, the Department of Unemployment Assistance, the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and the Department of Public Health.