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.

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. 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, and community groups and legal service providers from regions across the state 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 twelve 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 or tel: (617) 357-0700 Ext. 317; Melanie Rush at melanie@massappleseed.org or tel: (617) 482-8686; or Amy Grunder at agrunder@miracoalition.org or tel: (617) 230-9491.

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[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, the Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance, the Department of Mental Health, and the Office of Access and Opportunity.
### Endorsing Organizations

- American Immigration Lawyers Association
- Ascentria Care Alliance
- Asian Community Development Corporation
- Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
- Boston Bar Association
- Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center
- Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network
- Boston University School of Law Immigrants’ Rights and Human Trafficking Program
- Brockton Neighborhood Health Center
- Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee
- Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell, Inc.
- Center for Surgery and Public Health – Brigham and Women's Hospital
- Central West Justice Center
- Children’s Charter, Key Program Inc.
- Children's League of Massachusetts
- City of Fitchburg's Human Rights Commission
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission
- Community Economic Development Center of New Bedford
- De Novo Center for Justice and Healing
- Economic Mobility Pathways
- Family and Community Resources, Inc.
- Found in Translation
- Greater Boston Legal Services
- HarborCOV Communities Overcoming Violence
- Healing Abuse Working for Change
- Health Care For All
- Health Law Advocates
- Holyoke Public Schools
- Immigrant Justice Working Group at Brandeis University
- International Institute of New England
- Jane Doe Inc.
- Justice at Work
- Just Word Co-op
- La Colaborativa de Chelsea
- La Comunidad, Inc.
- Linguists Without Borders
- MAPA Translations Inc.
- Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
- Massachusetts Bar Association
- Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
- Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- Mass General Brigham
- Matahari Women Workers’ Center
- Maverick Landing Community Services
- MetroWest Legal Services
- New Hope, Inc
- Northeast Justice Center
- Pioneer Valley Workers Center
- SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs
- St Mark Community Education Program
- The Immigrants’ Assistance Center, Inc.
- The Justice Center of Southeast Massachusetts
- TranslateLive
- Unitarian Universalist Mass Action
- YWCA Cambridge

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