

The Language Access for All Coalition

An Act Relative to Language Access and Inclusion

H.4872



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. 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.

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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.

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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
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Economic Mobility Pathways
Family and Community Resources, Inc.
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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
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MAPA Translations Inc.
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