



**Testimony Submitted to the Joint Committee  
on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight  
In support of H.3084/S.1990, *An Act Relative to Language Access and Inclusion*  
By Amy Cooper, LWVMA Immigration Specialist  
October 10, 2023**

People rely on state agencies to meet their basic needs—feeding their families, getting health care, navigating the child welfare system, receiving unemployment insurance, to name just a few. However, dealing with state agencies is a major obstacle for the hundreds of thousands of people in MA with limited English proficiency (LEP) because most government services and the information about them are in English. For people with LEP, reading state-issued materials and communicating with state offices is an unsurmountable barrier. And this is a problem for large numbers of people. There are over 850,000 LEP speakers over the age of 5.

Having tutored a person from Colombia at Berkshire Community College, I saw up close how frustrating it can be for a person to try to access the services she needed. This student, a teacher in her home country, was working diligently on her English and making good progress on her conversational skills. However, she had nowhere near the ability to decipher the vocabulary and complexities of forms and applications, and she needed a lot of support.

This bill would expand the availability of non-English language resources, including American Sign Language, by requiring public-facing agencies to translate vital documents and to offer interpreting services. It would standardize and enforce strong language access plans, ensure sufficient staffing at the agencies, and establish an advisory board to provide guidance, oversight, and technical assistance.

Having access to information in one's primary language also gives LEP speakers a voice regarding issues that can have a profound effect on their communities. For example, when the Special Joint Committee on Redistricting held public hearings in 2021, LEP speakers were able to participate thanks to the translation of informational materials, as well as the hearings themselves, into the eight most common non-English languages spoken in our state. The hearings provided an opportunity for the majority of area residents to offer their opinions on local and community interests they wanted the Committee to consider when creating the new legislative districts. Such full participation would not have been possible without ensuring equitable language access to the redistricting tools and process.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 44 local leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, has a long history of advocating for equitable access to the services that help fulfill basic human needs. The League believes that social service programs should be responsive to the needs of the people being served. It is a longtime goal of the League to advocate for social and economic justice, secure equal rights for all and combat discrimination and poverty. With regard to redistricting, the League believes that the process must be accomplished in an open, unbiased manner with citizen participation and access at all levels of the process.

For all these reasons, the LWVMA supports this bill and asks that you favorably report this bill out of committee. Thank you for your consideration.