

HOUSE BILL No. 4891

September 22, 2015, Introduced by Reps. Chang, Santana, Pagan, Robinson, Love, Sarah Roberts, Greig, Yanez, Irwin, Guerra, Durhal, Plawecki, Zemke, Hoadley, Geiss and Singh and referred to the Committee on Government Operations.

A bill to facilitate access to state services by individuals with limited English proficiency; to provide for the powers and duties of certain state governmental officers and entities; to provide for biennial reports concerning equal language access; and to establish a process for submitting complaints and obtaining remedies for lack of equal language access.

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN ENACT:

1 Sec. 1. (1) This act shall be known and may be cited as the
2 "equal language access to state services act".

3 (2) As used in this act:

4 (a) "Covered entity" means a state department, agency, or
5 entity.

6 (b) "Equal language access" means the ability to receive
7 information and to participate in and benefit from public services

1 offered by a covered entity at a level equal to English-proficient
2 individuals.

3 (c) "Limited English proficiency" means the inability to
4 understand or to effectively express oneself in spoken or written
5 English because the individual's primary language is not English
6 and the individual has not developed fluency in the English
7 language.

8 (d) "Oral language services" includes various methods to
9 provide verbal information and interpretation, such as staff
10 interpreters, bilingual staff, telephone interpreter programs,
11 televideo interpretation services, and private interpreter
12 programs.

13 (e) "Vital documents" means printed or electronic documents
14 that provide important information necessary to access or
15 participate in services, programs, and activities of a covered
16 entity, including, but not limited to, applications, outreach
17 materials, and written notices of rights, denials, losses, or
18 decreases in benefits or services.

19 Sec. 2. Each covered entity shall take reasonable steps to
20 provide equal language access to public services for individuals
21 with limited English proficiency. Reasonable steps include all of
22 the following:

23 (a) Providing oral language services for individuals with
24 limited English proficiency through face-to-face, in-house oral
25 language services. Oral language services shall be provided by
26 individuals and through means with demonstrated competency in the
27 appropriate language. Oral language services provided by a

1 relative, friend, or bystander do not meet the requirements of this
2 act and do not substitute for the duty to provide access to oral
3 language services. However, the person with limited English
4 proficiency may choose to use an interpreter of his or her choice,
5 at his or her expense, in place of or as a supplement to the oral
6 language services the covered entity is required to provide.

7 (b) Having available sufficient, appropriate oral language
8 services to provide equal language access, based on reliable data
9 documenting the proportion of individuals with limited English
10 proficiency eligible to be served or encountered by the agency and
11 the frequency of encounters within the geographic area served, and
12 taking into consideration the nature and importance of the program,
13 activity, or service provided.

14 (c) Translating vital documents ordinarily provided to the
15 public into any language spoken by a population with limited
16 English proficiency that constitutes at least 3% of the overall
17 population within the geographic area or by 1,000 or more people
18 served by a local office of a state entity, based on any reliable
19 data, and providing those translated documents to local offices as
20 necessary.

21 (d) Any additional means necessary to achieve equal language
22 access to public services.

23 Sec. 3. A covered agency shall not charge individuals with
24 limited English proficiency for the use of oral language services
25 or translation.

26 Sec. 4. Every 2 years, each covered entity shall develop and
27 submit to the department of civil rights a report with information

1 and plans concerning implementation of equal language access to its
2 services. The report shall include all of the following:

3 (a) The number of bilingual staff who are available to
4 facilitate equal language access and the languages they facilitate.

5 (b) The number of bilingual staff determined to be needed for
6 each language to provide equal language access for the population
7 with limited English proficiency it serves.

8 (c) A plan to address any insufficiency in its ability to
9 provide equal language access.

10 (d) A list of vital documents that it has had translated and
11 the language of the translation.

12 (e) Designation of an employee as its language access
13 coordinator.

14 (f) A staff training plan related to equal language access.
15 The staff training plan must include specific information regarding
16 implementation, including the specific types of language services
17 available and how the covered entity will do all of the following:

18 (i) Obtain language services internally or from vendors.

19 (ii) Respond to callers with limited English proficiency.

20 (iii) Respond to written communications from persons with
21 limited English proficiency.

22 (iv) Respond to persons with limited English proficiency who
23 have in-person contact with staff.

24 (v) Ensure competency of interpreters and translation
25 services.

26 (vi) Indicate limited English proficiency status in data and
27 information systems.

1 (vii) Communicate information to the language access
2 coordinator about perceived changes in language services needed by
3 the population served and when that information will be
4 communicated.

5 (g) A plan to increase public awareness of the services
6 provided to facilitate equal language access.

7 Sec. 5. The department of civil rights shall do both of the
8 following:

9 (a) Create a complaint form and a process for members of the
10 public to use to report and pursue a remedy for instances of
11 noncompliance with this act.

12 (b) Designate a language access liaison to work with covered
13 entities to train staff, develop resources, and facilitate
14 compliance with this act.

15 Enacting section 1. This act takes effect 90 days after the
16 date it is enacted into law.

17 Enacting section 2. It is the intent of the legislature that
18 in implementing this act each covered entity be guided by federal
19 Executive Order No. 13166 and related implementing provisions of
20 federal law, regulation, and guidance in providing language access
21 services, whether or not the covered entity receives federal
22 funding.