

SUPPORT LANGUAGE ACCESS IMPROVEMENT IN VA

Investing in **Budget Item 267 #7h (Tran)** and **Budget Item 331 #6s (Hashmi)** addresses following realities:

Limited English Proficient (LEP)-identified Virginians exist across the Commonwealth

- Over **450,000** Virginians identified as LEP, representing over 30 languages across the state.
 - 4% of Central, Southwest, and Southeast Virginia's population identified as LEP
 - 10% of Northern Virginia's population identified as LEP
- The top 10 languages spoken in Virginia (after English) include: Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Hindi, Arabic, Amharic, Farsi, French, and Filipino (such as Tagalog and Visayan)

Improving language access helps disabled Virginians of all ages

- According to the Virginia Dept. for the Blind and Vision Impaired, there are over **179,000** Virginians with vision difficulties including blindness and vision loss
 - This includes over **15,000 children** (<18 y/o) and over **80,000 older adults** (65+)
 - Impact: These Virginians could not easily read physical mail sent to them about the status of their applications (example: Medicaid "Notice of Action" letters)
- According to the Virginia Dept. of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, over **700,000** Virginians are impacted by hearing loss and limitations
 - Impact: These Virginians could not easily access information only available over the phone (example: VEC's Unemployment Insurance information and application)

Better language access brings economic and social benefits to the Commonwealth

- Asian Americans make up 12% and Latinos make up 9.2% of all small businesses owners in Virginia according to the SBA Office of Advocacy. Both regularly point to **language barriers as one of the top issues to starting and growing their businesses.**
- Average income for LEP-identified Virginians is \$15,000 lower than non-LEP. Better language access means less isolation and greater integration.

State Agencies support - and are trying to provide - comprehensive language access

- The Department of Social Services (DSS) already has a process and infrastructure set up to support state agency language access, which was started last year and needs to be followed through to the end
- As of 2023, the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) provides language support options available for LEP customers, such as:
 - Babel notices (in English and translated) on their website
 - An updated phone menu in 13 language options and interpreters available
- Multiple state agencies have created language access plans, including (but not limited to) Dept. of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), Dept. of Transportation (VDOT), and the Virginia Judicial System

