



August 11, 2025

The Honorable Representative Antonio F.D. Cabral
House Chair
Joint Committee on State Administration and
Regulatory Oversight

The Honorable Senator Nick Collins
Senate Chair
Joint Committee on State Administration and
Regulatory Oversight

Dear Chair Cabral, Chair Pacheco, and Committee Members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of over 60 private and public organizations and individuals that collectively advocate for public policies and quality services that are in the best interest of the Commonwealth's children, youth and families. It is through public education and advocacy that CLM promotes the availability, accessibility, and quality of these needed services. Our members - providers, advocates and regulators of services - know first-hand the struggles that children and their families face in the Commonwealth.

We are writing to testify in **support of "An Act Relative to Language Access and Inclusion" ([H.3384/S.2125](#))**. Vulnerable youth and families interact with many state agencies, including for example the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Improved language access within DCF would achieve two goals. First, it would greatly improve the ability of families to find and access assistance and culturally relevant services and programs that support families and reduce incidents of child abuse and neglect. Second, it would improve the ability of DCF to work effectively with limited English proficient (LEP) youth and families to achieve a positive outcome in a timely fashion.

In the state of Massachusetts, almost one in ten residents are considered limited English proficient. They do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to speak, write, or understand English. This is also true of families served by DCF, where the top primary languages other than English are Spanish,

Portuguese, Haitian Creole, “Other”, Cape Verdean Creole, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer (Cambodian) and American Sign Language.¹

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) “connect families to needed supports, offer evidence-based parent education classes and support groups, provide school-related educational support, and offer recreational and other community-focused activities.”² As a primary tool for keeping children and families stable and safe, including in unpredictable emergencies, FRCs must have the ability to provide services in a family’s native language. The Commonwealth must invest in the tools and infrastructure that allow nimble access to translation and interpretation services when a family is most in need and when services will matter most to keep a family from falling further into harm.

Once a family is in the child welfare system, language barriers can make it even more difficult to achieve a rapid and positive resolution. The Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice examined the impact of insufficient language services within DCF and how families with limited English proficiency (LEP) may disproportionately experience negative outcomes during their involvement with DCF. The findings are stark:

- “Despite a few individual ‘superstar’ caseworkers, the majority of LEP parents do not receive sufficient interpretation services, document translation services, or social services in their primary language.
- A lack of competent and impartial interpretation plagues DCF casework; it is estimated that an interpreter is present in only 25% of the LEP home visits the agency conducts.
- LEP families regularly do not receive Action Plans, letters, notices, and agreements translated into their primary languages.
- Often LEP parents experience wait times double those that English-speaking parents face when trying to attend the social services (such as therapy, substance use disorder meetings, or parenting classes) that are mandated by DCF.”³

¹ DCF FY2023 Annual Report

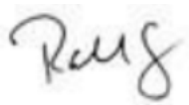
² Massachusetts Family Resource Center Network 2023 Program Evaluation Report (March 2024)

³ “Families Torn Apart: Language-Based Discrimination at the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families”, a report by Massachusetts Appleseed (January 2021)

As described in the report, language access goes beyond simply translating materials. It means ensuring a family understands the process and expectations of government systems involvement, and how to resolve their situations. For example, without proper translation and interpretation, a family may not understand why their children are being removed by DCF, what corrective steps they must take, the gravity or urgency of their case, or their rights under the law. A family should never be forced to sign a DCF Action Plan without being able to fully review and discuss the plan in their native language and fully understand their obligations and rights. Furthermore, language barriers can hinder access to culturally relevant community-based programs required in the Action Plan. Disregard for language-accessible programs can lead to DCF workers labeling parents as noncompliant, increasing the likelihood of child removals and resulting in children unnecessarily and even permanently separated from their families.

Stronger language access legislation can help children and family serving state agencies best carry out their missions. Child welfare cases, the juvenile justice system, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Youth Services and more – are there to help children, families and communities in complex situations. We believe strongly that Massachusetts must take action to ensure language barriers are not exacerbating the trauma of children and families most in need of help from government agencies. We strongly urge you to vote this bill out favorably and work diligently for its passage without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rachel".

Rachel Gwaltney
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts