



Senator Hearcel F. Craig
15th Senate District

Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
Senate Bill 298 Sponsor Testimony
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Chair Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on Senate Bill 298. This piece of legislation would require the Ohio Department of Health's Covid-19 website and its coronavirus hotline to offer translations in Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Nepali, and Somali.

Ohio has a rich history of having diverse ethnic communities. Columbus is fortunate to be home to 20,000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese residentsⁱ, making Columbus the largest Bhutanese-Nepali population in the United States. Akron also is home to 5,000 Nepali-Bhutanese residentsⁱ. Columbus is also proudly home to the second largest Somali population in the United States with 40,000 residentsⁱⁱ.

There were over 455,000 Hispanic residents in Ohio as of 2018, representing about 4% of our state's populationⁱⁱⁱ. A majority of the state's largest Hispanic clusters are in Northern Ohio. Ohio also has over 22,000 Arabic-speaking citizens and almost 26,000 residents who speak Chinese^{iv}.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 69,000 Ohio homes were limited-English-speaking^v in 2018.

The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services already uses the services of Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Nepali and Somali translators and already has an infrastructure in place to assist Ohioans who speak these languages. This legislation was introduced before the Ohio Latino Affairs Commission started translating

¹ <https://www.crisohio.org/bhutanese-nepali/>

important resources about Covid-19 on both the website and hotline into Spanish and before the Department of Health started offering translations in Nepali, Chinese and Somali on their websites. This legislation would require the DOH to continue offering the translations that are already available on its coronavirus website and to add translations in Arabic. It would also require the Department of Health to make Nepali, Chinese and Somali translators available on the Covid-19 hotline.

When calling the ODH's Covid-19 hotline, there are currently two options; English and Spanish. Operators are being told to write down the information of callers who speak Arabic, Nepali or Somali. This can be difficult and problematic due to several language barriers and the potential for the citizen to be unable to properly give their contact information. Non-English speakers are able to utilize LanguageLine, an app that offers phone translation services but that costs \$3.95 a minute. Ohioans should not have to use an expensive app to try and get critical information from our state government that is free to English and Spanish speakers. Ohio already has Somali and Arabic translators on retainer. It has three Arabic translators who are available through video remote interpreting (VRI) and telephonic interpretation (TI), and one Somali translator who is available through VRI and TI and one translator who is available through VRI^{vi}.

LSC has reported that this legislation will have no to minimal cost on local governments. As Ohio reopens, it is crucial that everybody knows the importance of practicing social distancing and protecting the community. By having these resources available in languages other than English, we could demolish the language barrier in these already confusing and unprecedented times.

When the pandemic started, Governor Mike DeWine said that we are all in this together. He continues to remind us to stay safe. It is vitally important that all resources put together by the Department of Health are available to our friends and constituents who struggle with the English language. By passing this legislation, Ohio will truly be in this together.

I wanted to take a moment to thank Chairman Burke and the members of the committee for the opportunity to consider this legislation. I welcome any questions you might have at this time.

ⁱ <https://development.ohio.gov/files/research/P7002.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.dispatch.com/news/20190212/ohios-african-immigrant-community-growing-in-size-diversity-and-impact>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://development.ohio.gov/files/research/P7002.pdf>

^{iv} <http://www.city-data.com/states/Ohio-Languages.html>

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https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=speak%20english%20less%20than%20well&hidePreview=true&tid=ACSDT1Y2018.B16002&vintage=2018&g=0400000US39_1600000US3916000,3918000,3915000,3977000,3901000,3944856&moe=false

^{vi} <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvcs/certification/rosters/language.pdf>