



MARY'S PLACE REFUGEE OUTREACH

BLOSSOM ON NEW GROUND

414 Lexington Ave.
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marysplaceoutreach.org

January 25, 2022

New York State Assembly and Senate
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Human Services Committee

RE: In support of Bill S5236A / A7428A – Language Access

Dear Honorable Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Charlseyy Bickett and I am the Executive Director of Mary's Place Refugee Outreach in Rochester, NY. I write this letter in support of S5236A / A7428A, legislation aimed at expanding the current language access laws.

Mary's Place Refugee Outreach is a small nonprofit that offers free programs and services to resettled refugees. We serve adult resettled refugees from twelve different countries who have all been forced to flee their homes for a chance at a peaceful, safe life. Most of the clients we serve are women, many of which who spent 10-20 years in a refugee camp prior to being resettled, and who enter the US with limited education and English proficiency. This language barrier causes major obstacles to obtaining employment, understanding American systems and programs, and even issues of law and order. These resilient families are grateful for their opportunity for a new life, however the lack of language access presents extraordinary obstacles in achieving their American dream.

During 2021, we served families that spoke a total of 16 languages. Of those 16 languages, only two were included in the current New York State Language Access policy. These families have a difficult time navigating their new lives in Rochester to begin with, and the COVID-19 public health crisis has only exasperated this issue. Many families feel as if they have been left behind when it comes to government efforts in communicating with and educating them on important information related to the pandemic, especially with vaccination. We have been working diligently for years to earn the trust of resettled refugees and as such feel it is our responsibility to work with the private and public sector to include our communities in these critical conversations in times of such uncertainty.

We believe that the current language access does not properly support the needs of the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) community, especially in that the languages identified were decided by the total percentage of languages spoken by the State of New York as a whole. Legislation S5236A / A7428A would expand the total number of included languages from 10 to 12, but also would allow for each region in NYS to determine those languages based on the regional data, not the State's. This is critical as the top languages spoken in Rochester and other regions in western New York, greatly differ from languages spoken in other regions of the state. Therefore, the resettled refugees in each region would be better served throughout the state with the passing of this legislation.





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The lack of language access for Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals can have catastrophic consequences for families. It is a serious threat to public health, public safety, and personal rights. No child should go hungry because their parent is unable to complete an application to SNAP because they cannot read or write in English. No child should be depended on to read and interpret a notice from court to their parents. No child should be responsible for trying to explain vaccine information to their family.

If is for these reasons that I implore you to support Legislation S5236A / A7428A to create better access to information and greater equity among all New Americans.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Charlsey Bickett, Executive Director
Mary's Place Refugee Outreach
Rochester, NY

