

February 17, 2022

Re: S.147

Dear Chairman White and Members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations,

My name is Lynn Stanley, and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW VT). I am writing to express our support for S.147; an act related to language access plans.

This bill addresses the inequity that the limited English proficiency (LEP) and American Sign Language (ASL) populations are currently facing in the state of Vermont. The beginning of the COVID pandemic highlighted these challenges when municipalities and state agencies were unprepared to effectively communicate public safety messages to LEP and ASL communities, in part due to ineffective policies around language access. Along with the larger scale challenges such as public safety, these populations continue to experience barriers when attempting to interact with healthcare, judicial, and educational entities.

These challenges faced by the LEP and ASL communities result in equity issues around access and outcomes. A 2019 study by Diamond et al. demonstrated that “LEP is an independent driver of health disparities and exacerbates other social determinants of health.” There is this intersectionality that occurs when populations who often have limited financial and social resources are unable to have access to quality health and legal services, or educational opportunities.

This is a social justice issue and the large-scale changes that need to occur will require legislative backing and policies that not only incentivize but establish a system of accountability. A requirement for language access plans for state agencies will then set a precedence for private sector providers and local businesses.

Social workers see the challenges that both the ASL and LEP communities are currently facing, and we encourage the legislation to recognize these issues and take the steps towards change.

Communication is essential to building inclusive communities. By voting to pass S.147, we will be improving Vermont by strengthening our workforce, our economy, and our cultural awareness. We all benefit from inclusive practices.

Respectfully submitted,

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