

MEMORANDUM

TO: House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Song Nguyen, Director of Health Equity

DATE: April 16, 2026

SUBJECT: S.243, An act relating to distributing funds to the Vermont Language Justice Project

Health equity is a core part of the Health Department's mission and values. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that one of the ways to enhance equity was to ensure our public health information was accessible to as many people in Vermont as possible, including translated materials.

During the pandemic, we were fortunate to have received federal funding, including a CDC Grant specifically focused on reducing health disparities, to support a variety of equity-related work at the Health Department. Vermont Language Justice Project became a valued partner particularly during that time. They were able to create and distribute messages quickly in various languages and understood unique cultural differences that helped messages resonate with the public. Vermont Language Justice Project has since built large library of videos that we still reference to this day (baby sleep safety, ticks, sunscreen).

We understand that people who speak and read other languages need information to stay safe and healthy just as urgently as those who speak and read English. In emergency situations like a pandemic or a flood, not having information readily available is not just inequitable – we understand, it can put lives at risk.

On a personal note, I am a proud descent of a former refugee from Vietnam, and immigrant from South Korea, born and raised in VT. I grew up seeing my parents struggle with language access needs every single day. It impacted how they got their needs met, or not, and certainly impacted how I was able to access resources growing up in Vermont. I can attest; the Health Department takes translation and interpretation very seriously.





The Health Department regularly assesses language needs to better serve Vermonters. We have nearly 2,000 translated materials [on our website](#), including vital documents and general resources for Vermonters who need to access information and services (i.e. WIC applications, vaccination consent forms, etc.).

When there is an emergency that requires the Health Department's guidance, we use our content experts to determine if new materials need to be created. We have proactively created evergreen materials that are shared on our website and distributed to our partners, such as air quality alerts or heat advisories, to ensure timely messaging. We also use WhatsApp as an alternative form of communication for these alerts.

Additionally, when we apply for grants, funding is regularly set aside for translated materials, for example, the Public Health Infrastructure Grant. We also have a memorandum of understanding with the Office of Racial Equity to access funds they have set aside for vital translations.

The Health Department already has resources to do translation work consistently. We also recognize that all of state government would benefit from the important work Vermont Language Justice Project is doing. We absolutely support VT Language Justice Project's efforts to ensure their services can be accessed more readily by state government, even beyond the Health Department. In a statewide emergency, other agencies are often leading messaging, it is not always the Health Department. It's clear that a broader approach beyond the Health Department, for translation support, would help reach more Vermonters with critical information, most effectively.

