



**Testimony in Support of S 2459  
Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee  
March 6, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chairman Sarlo and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey (LWVNJ). My name is Philip Hensley and I am the Democracy Policy Analyst with LWVNJ. I am here to testify in support of S 2459.

This legislation would provide translation and interpretation services at relevant state government agencies. The League has long supported efforts to ensure that government services are accessible to all New Jersey residents, and this bill is an essential tool to ensure that services are provided equitably. Nearly one in four New Jerseyans is foreign born, and one in four households speaks a language other than English; the Census Bureau has identified over 155 languages that are spoken in New Jersey. Most significantly, New Jersey also has a high proportion of speakers with limited English proficiency; 42.5% of foreign-born New Jerseyans over 5 years old speak English less than “very well.” Therefore, we support the legislation’s focus on communities with limited English proficiency, and specifically support the requirement that state agencies provide services in the 15 most-common languages spoken by those with limited English proficiency. Given New Jersey’s incredible linguistic diversity, providing services for these 15 languages is absolutely necessary, and should be considered the minimum acceptable level of service to achieve meaningful accessibility.

We are mindful of the costs that providing language services would require of state government, but believe the legislation correctly identifies resources allocated under the American Rescue Plan as an appropriate source of funding. The US Treasury Department specifically directed states to use American Rescue Plan funds for programs that address disparities and improve the ability of states to respond to public health and other emergencies. We believe enhanced language access provisions meet that directive. Significantly, Virginia and other states have already allocated ARP dollars toward language access. New Jersey should follow suit. This bill would ensure that communities that are underserved and have difficulty accessing essential services can have their needs met. We respectfully ask that you vote yes on S 2459. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to present testimony.

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