



Testimony to Texas House Human Services Committee on HB 5166

Karla Martinez, Policy Analyst, Every Texan

April 25, 2023

Every Texan (formerly CPPP) appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5166. The Benedictine Sisters of Boerne, Texas, founded Every Texan (formerly CPPP) in 1985 to advance public policy solutions for expanding access to health care. Today, we prioritize policies that will measurably improve equity in and access to health care, food security, education, and financial security. We are based in Austin, Texas, and work statewide.

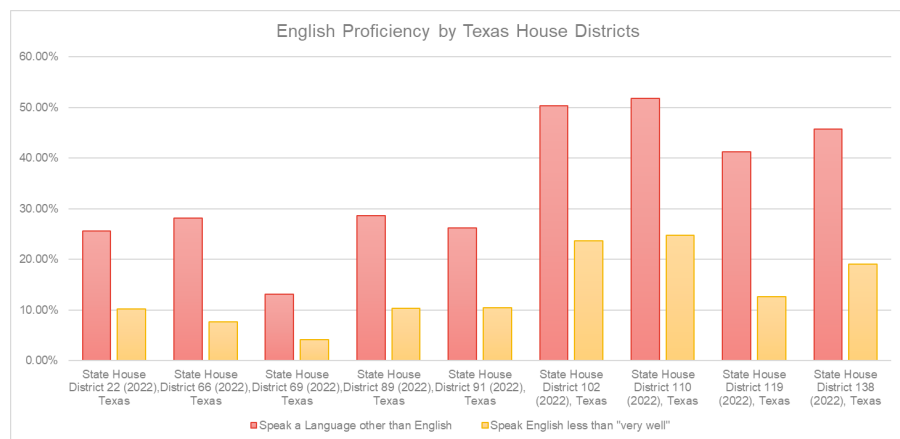
Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are essential programs that provide vital assistance to low-income Texans, helping them to access the food and health care they need to maintain their health and well-being. However, for many Texans who are limited English proficient or who have other communication needs, navigating the application process can be extremely challenging. Language barriers can prevent pregnant women, parents, or grandparents raising grandchildren from completing applications accurately and in a timely manner, ultimately leading to delays or denials of benefits.

HB 5166 would reduce language access barriers families face when they try to access services.

HB 5166 would help to address some of these challenges by directing the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to create a Language Access Plan (LAP) that ensures all Texans have access to application materials in commonly spoken languages. This bill would direct HHSC to make key resources including applications, notices, and Your Texas Benefits available in multiple languages, including Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, and Arabic.

Texas households commonly speak languages other than English

More than one in three Texas households speaks a language other than English and 13% of Texans have limited English proficiency¹. In most of the Texas House districts represented on the House Human Services Committee (Districts 22, 89, 91, 102, 110, 119, and 138), 25% or more of residents speak a language other than English, and



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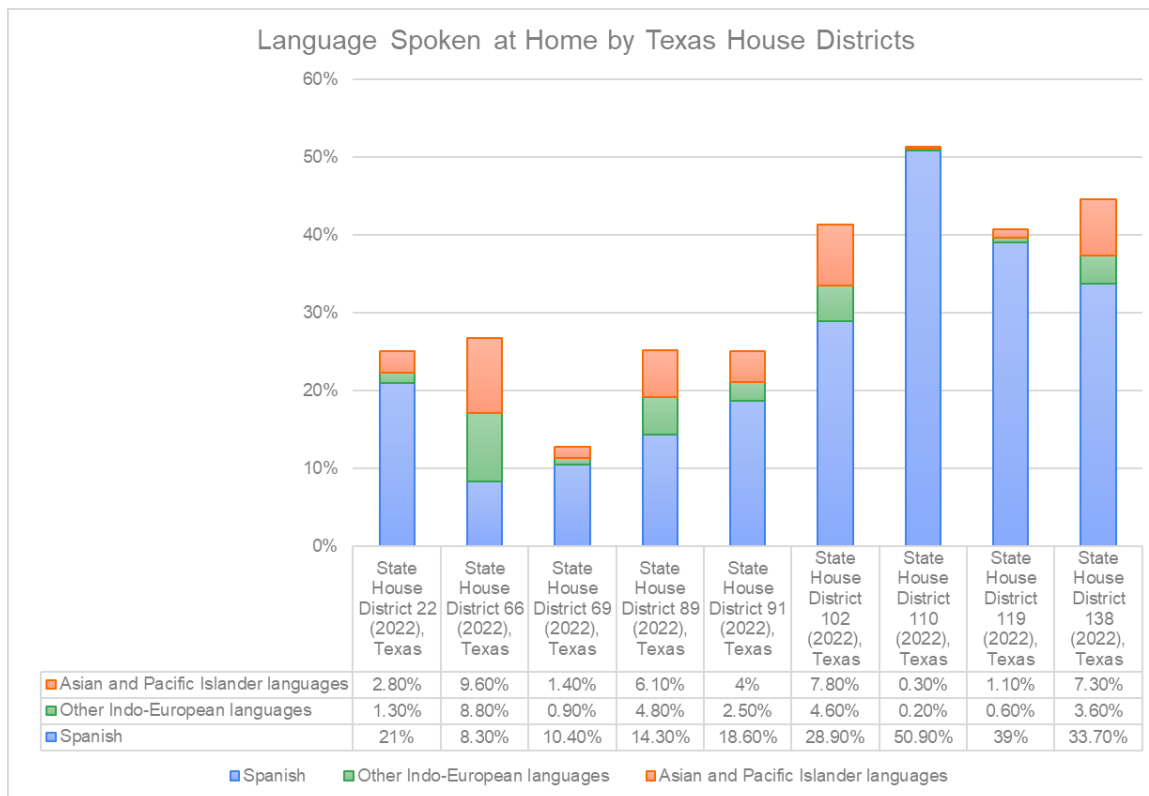
¹ U.S Census Bureau, 2017-2021 ACS 5-year estimates (DP02 | Selected Social Characteristics)

10% or more of the district's residents speak English "less than very well."² In Texas House Districts 102 and 110 more than half of the district's residents speak a language other than English.³

Language barriers prevent eligible Texans from enrolling in Medicaid and SNAP

The Texas House recently passed 12 months of postpartum coverage for new moms. To ensure that all Texas mothers and their babies have their best chance at staying healthy, we need to remove language barriers that prevent pregnant women from accessing Medicaid and WIC. Texas cannot reach all *eligible* children and pregnant women if Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP applications and accompanying services remain available consistently only in English and sometimes in Spanish.

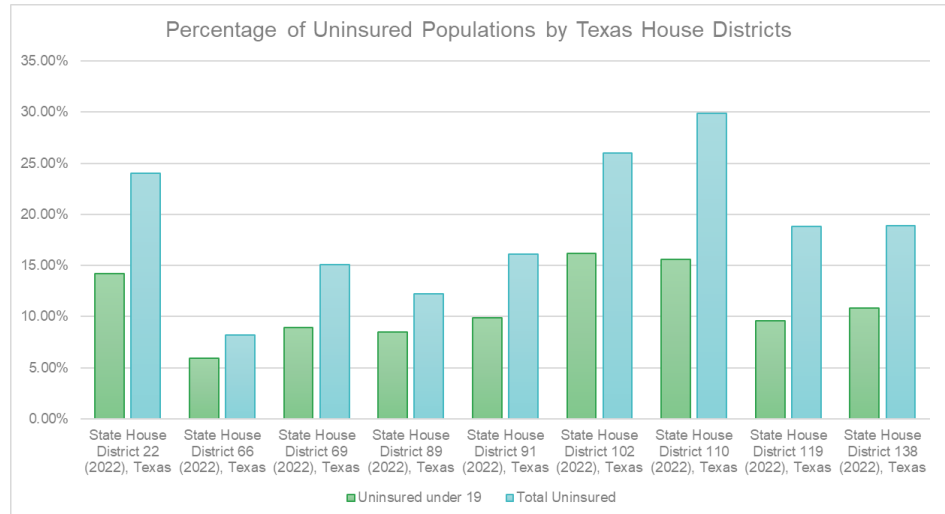
HB 5166 would direct translation and interpretation in languages spoken by a group in this state with a population of at least 50,000 of which at least 33 percent have limited English proficiency including Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic, Mandarin/Cantonese, and Chinese. Of those that speak a language other than English at home, Spanish is the next most spoken language in each district represented by this committee. However, Asian and Pacific Islander languages account for more than 5% of the district population in districts 68, 89, 102, and 138. House District 66 also has more than 8% of the district population speaking other Indo-European languages.



² U.S Census Bureau, *2017-2021 ACS 5-year estimates* (DP02 | Selected Social Characteristics)

³ U.S Census Bureau, *2017-2021 ACS 5-year estimates* (DP02 | Selected Social Characteristics)

Texas has both the highest rate- 18%- and number of uninsured.⁴ Texas House districts 22, 102, and 110 have a higher uninsured rate than the Texas average.⁵



National studies have shown that adults lacking English proficiency are at higher risk of being uninsured compared to those who are English proficient.⁶

Pre-pandemic data show at least 400,000 Texas children were uninsured in 2019 despite being eligible for Medicaid or CHIP, making it harder for them to go to doctor check-ups, get needed medicine, access mental health support, and more. This month HHSC began the task of re-checking eligibility for all 5.9 million Texans with Medicaid following a 3-year nationwide pause on disenrollments during the pandemic. Unfortunately, the state is only providing outreach resources in English and in Spanish leaving many community organizations to fill in critical gaps so Texans already enrolled understand what is happening.

Language Access Plans are a common and common-sense tool

An LAP will ensure equitable access to all services and rights related to language access by informing LEP communities of their rights, having translated public information and announcements viewable in public spaces, and conducting intentional outreach to LEP communities.

Translating program applications and materials to multiple languages will reduce the cost of providing live interpretation services through 2-1-1. Currently when non-English or Spanish speakers call 2-1-1 they go through a series of prompts in English to request an interpreter and potentially get connected to one. By providing materials in additional languages, Texans can have information about program requirements, how to complete an application, and submit applications with supporting documentation. These one-time investments can save the agency money in live interpretation and save ongoing staff time.

⁴ <https://everytexan.org/2022/10/28/2021-census-data-provides-insight-into-the-uninsured-population-of-texas/>

⁵ U.S Census Bureau, *2017-2021 ACS 5-year estimates* (DP03 | Selected Economic Characteristics)

⁶Foiles Sifuentes, Andriana M et al. "The Role of Limited English Proficiency and Access to Health Insurance and Health Care in the Affordable Care Act Era." *Health equity* vol. 4,1 509-517. 11 Dec. 2020

LAPs are common nationally and are used by other Texas state agencies, including [Texas Commission on Environmental Quality \(TCEQ\) \(2021\)](#),⁷ [Texas Department of Transportation \(TX DoT\) \(2014\)](#),⁸ and the [Texas Supreme Court \(2014\)](#).⁹ A HHSC LAP does not have to start from scratch and can build off of a [federal blueprint](#).¹⁰

By passing HB5166 we can ensure that all Texans, regardless of language proficiency, have access to the critical social services they need to maintain their health and well-being.

⁷ <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/agency/decisions/participation/language-access-plan-gi-608.pdf>

⁸ <https://ftp.dot.state.tx.us/pub/txdot-info/ocr/language-assistance-plan.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/934559/supreme-court-of-texas-language-access-plan.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/open/pres-actions/2013-hhs-language-access-plan.pdf>