



March 25, 2024

To: Chair Woodrow, Vice Chair Boesenecker, and members of the House State, Civic, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee

From: Victoria Francis, Deputy Director, State and Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council

Re: HB24-1368: Language Access Advisory Board

Dear Chair Woodrow, Vice Chair Boesenecker, and members of the House State, Civic, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee,

My name is Victoria Francis, and I am the Deputy Director of State and Local Initiatives at the American Immigration Council (the Council) and a Colorado resident. The Council works to create a more welcoming America – one that provides a fair immigration process for New Americans and adopts policies that consider the vital contributions they make to the U.S. economy.

I am submitting this letter in strong support of HB24-1368: Language Access Advisory Board, which would create a Language Access Advisory Board to assess and develop recommendations for improving meaningful access to the legislative process for populations with limited English proficiency. The creation of the language advisory board is a crucial step in ensuring all residents, particularly immigrant residents, in Colorado, can fully participate in the state's legislative process.

According to my organization's research, since 2016, over 100 immigrant-related bills or bills that reference immigrant communities have been introduced in Colorado; 29 have directly referenced limited English proficiency or language access. These bills, and many others considered by the legislature, directly impact the lives of Colorado's immigrant residents, who may have limited English proficiency. Due to the language barriers currently present in the state's legislative process, immigrant residents may not have had an opportunity or felt welcome to voice their opinions on matters impacting them and their families. It is lawmakers' duty to ensure that all Coloradans can participate in the legislative process.

To help illustrate why this issue is important and why it is imperative that the state legislature work towards increasing accessibility to the state legislative process for limited English proficiency populations, my organization conducted quantitative research using data from the 2021 American Community Survey to highlight the contributions immigrants and refugees make in Colorado. Our research¹ shows that **Colorado is home to a sizable and strong community of over 560,000 immigrants and refugees, making up about 9.6 percent—or nearly one in ten residents—of the state's population.**

¹ Available at <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/colorado/#>

These communities represent significant geographic and language diversity. Over a third of immigrant residents in Colorado were from Mexico, making up the largest country of origin for immigrant residents, followed by India, Korea, El Salvador, and China, which each comprised around 3.0 percent of the immigrant population in the state. Of these immigrant residents, 78.3 percent of them were proficient in English. The diversity in the countries of origin for immigrant residents reflects the need for a Language Access Advisory Board that can critically scrutinize and identify the barriers that the limited English-proficient population faces in the state's legislative process.

Additionally, our research reveals the striking impact immigrants and refugees have on Colorado's economy,² further illustrating the need to ensure all voices are present when making decisions that impact Colorado's workforce, entrepreneurs, and economy:

- Colorado's immigrant community is critical to the state's future workforce: **82.6 percent of immigrants in Colorado are of working age** (16-64 years of age) compared to 64.2 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts.
- **Colorado's immigrant residents paid over \$5.9 billion in taxes in 2021 — including \$1.9 billion in state and local taxes** — and held \$17.4 billion in spending power that is reinjected back into the state's economy.
- **Over one in ten of the state's entrepreneurs are immigrants.** As business owners, immigrants are an integral part of Colorado's diverse and thriving business community. They help create jobs and employ numerous Colorado residents.
- **Immigrants comprise over one in ten workers in the state's labor force.** Colorado's immigrant residents were crucial in numerous important industries and occupations, such as healthcare. In fact, immigrants made up 17.6 percent of the state's health aides, 12.2 percent of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) workers, and 47.9 percent of maids and housekeeping cleaners.

By creating a Language Access Advisory Board, Colorado takes an important stride forward toward ensuring all its residents can participate in the legislative process. Colorado's immigrant residents contribute greatly to the state's economy and community, so the state needs to ensure these residents can participate in a process that impacts their livelihood. The Language Access Advisory Board is another step on Colorado's path to ensure the successful integration of all its immigrant residents. I encourage you to support the passage of HB24-1368.

Thank you for your consideration,

Victoria Francis
Deputy Director, State and Local Initiatives
American Immigration Council

² Available at <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/colorado/#>

Supporting HB24-1368 by Rev. Leta Behrens, Pastor, Our Saviour's Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2000 South Lemay, Fort Collins, CO, 970-484-3133, leta@our-saviours.org

TO: House, State, Civic, Military, & Veterans Affairs

DATE: March 25, 2024

RE: HB24-1368

Good morning members of the House State, Civic, Military and Veteran's Affairs committee. My name is Rev. Leta Behrens and I am with the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado. I write in support of HB24-1368 as a Colorado resident who is an ordained pastor who works closely with refugee and immigrant communities; a member of organizations and committees through the Fort Collins Area Interfaith Council and the Interfaith Solidarity and Accompaniment Coalition in Larimer County that work to ensure access and rights to newcomers to our country and state; and a concerned citizen who seeks to ensure that language not be a barrier to participation in legislative processes.

As a pastor in my community, I have accompanied refugee families and persons who have entered into our country and found that even as they follow all legal requirements and processes for their entry and path to citizenship, they are often without resources for interpretation and equitable understanding of legislative procedures and processes due to barriers in language. Oftentimes newcomers are arriving from situations of war, political discrimination and lack of education in written language. This makes participating in civic life extremely difficult, denies access, and creates a lack of understanding and ability to be full members of our community.

My congregation currently accompanies persons by helping to provide translators when they are needed for spoken and written assistance. We also provide space and financial support for English language learning classes. I believe that these services working in tandem with increased accessibility from the legislatures will enhance our lives as a diverse community and create opportunities for those with limited English proficiency to be fully participating members of our state. This will enrich and deepen relationships, equitable rights, and a positive place for newcomers to be good citizens.

My understanding of HB24-1368 is that through the formation of a Language Access Advisory board, we can learn more about the needs and best practices for moving forward in creating space for access to legislative processes for those who are not proficient in English. Through the work of this board, new developments can be made with the grounding of research and the advice of experts in the field. I am in full support of this bill and this initiative as the formation of this board will serve to increase capacity for continued just and fair access for all persons.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for HB24-1368.