

House State, Civic, Military, & Veterans Affairs

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HB23-1237 Inclusive Language Emergency Situations

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

Name, Position, Representing	Typed Text of Testimony
<p>Birch Barron</p> <p>For</p> <p>Eagle County Emergency Management</p>	<p>Members of the Colorado House State, Civic, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee:</p> <p>Public Safety in Colorado is a partnership between local governments, first responders, and the communities we serve. Here in the mountains, our people are tough, resilient, and adaptable in the face of increasing threats from wildfires, landslides, floods, and any other hazard that gets thrown our way. But when these disasters happen, we look to our local public safety agencies to provide information and resources to help us understand how to keep ourselves and our families safe.</p> <p>As the Emergency Manager in Eagle County, it is my job to continually ask “which members of our community aren’t we reaching?” We know that in every emergency, there are people in our communities who experience some kind of barrier that prevents them from accessing the resources and services they need to keep themselves safe. While there are many different types of barriers that might come up, we know for a fact that emergency information is not going to be well-understood by people for whom English is not their first language unless we make a specific effort to ensure emergency communications are accessible to them. In the middle of a disaster is not the time to be struggling to understand evacuation routes and instructions to keep yourself safe.</p> <p>Here in Eagle County, 1/3 of our population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, and more than half of the students in our schools live in homes where English is not the primary language, and many counties across Colorado are in the same situation. I am not going to say that the goal of multilingual emergency alerts will be easy, emergency alert authorities and systems are different in nearly every county in Colorado, But I am saying that it is important enough that we can’t just look the other way because it is hard. When it comes to emergency communications, while it might be difficult, it is our responsibility to try to understand the challenges and find ways to make sure critical alerts are accessible to everyone in our community.</p>

	In that spirit, I encourage the Colorado General Assembly to support House Bill 23-1237 and work towards improving language access in emergency alerts.
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