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Delegate Kathy Tran
900 East Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219

February 3, 2022

Dear Delegate Tran,

As a proud Virginian and leader of a local nonprofit that connects refugee and new immigrant communities to resources needed to integrate and thrive, I'm writing to support Virginia HB1049, the language access equity bill that establishes the Interagency Language Access Working Group as part of the Governor's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

I have seen firsthand the tremendous impact that language access has on the lives of people who have been forced from their home countries and are working hard to rebuild their lives here. Removing unnecessary language barriers provides newcomers with the opportunity to learn information, navigate public systems, and communicate clearly, enabling these families to integrate sooner and more smoothly, which in turn contributes to the economic well-being, overall safety, and strength of their new communities.

One public agency with especially broad impact is the Department of Motor Vehicles. Without meaningful language access in the driver's license process, refugee and immigrant newcomers are currently denied DMV resources that are readily available to most long-term, English-speaking residents. Virginia HB1049 would provide future drivers with a clearer sense of traffic rules and regulations and ensure a better understanding of road safety before newcomers get behind the wheel. By producing safer drivers, language access makes Virginia roads safer for everyone.

This is just one example of how language access equity is a critical issue affecting all Virginians. An Interagency Language Access Working Group is needed to ensure that our public agencies provide meaningful access for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Laura Berge Jones".

Laura Berge Jones
Associate Director
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