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HOUSE BILL NO. 302

Offered January 14, 2004

Prefiled January 9, 2004

A BILL to direct the Department of General Services to establish a statewide contract for telephonic language interpretation services and other interpretation and translation services.

Patron—Cox

Referred to Committee on General Laws

Whereas, the 2000 United States Census recorded 570,279 foreign-born residents in the Commonwealth, representing more than eight percent of the state's overall population; and

Whereas, between 1990 and 2000 the share of non-English speakers at home in the Commonwealth increased by nearly half, from 7.3 percent to 10.8 percent; and

Whereas, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ("Title VI") prohibits recipients of federal funds from discriminating against individuals on the basis of race, color, or national origin, which has been interpreted to require meaningful access to information and services for limited English-speaking individuals; and

Whereas, federal guidance makes clear that, even in jurisdictions in which English has been declared the official language — as in Virginia — federal fund recipients must still ensure compliance with Title VI; and

Whereas, a recent Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report titled "Acclimation of Virginia's Foreign-Born Population" found that the language barrier is the greatest challenge to foreign-born residents and their acclimation into the Commonwealth's economic and social structures, and that approaches taken to accommodate the language needs of this population segment by individual state and local government agencies have varied from comprehensive to minimal; and

Whereas, the JLARC report further found that state and local agencies lack a coordinated approach to addressing the language barrier, resulting in inefficiencies and excessive costs, for example through duplicative written translations, development of multiple telephone interpreter contracts, etc., and that policies addressing the language barrier are needed to ensure compliance with federal Title VI requirements and more cost-effective use of available resources; and

Whereas, in light of Title VI requirements, a review of government policies and strategies is needed to determine how to provide meaningful access to information and services for Virginia's limited English-speaking residents in the most cost-effective manner possible; now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. § 1. *The Department of General Services shall, in coordination with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, establish a statewide contract for telephonic language interpretation services and other interpretation and translation services to Virginia's limited English-speaking residents, if it determines that such a contract is cost-effective.*

INTRODUCED

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