

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5304

As of January 24, 2023

Title: An act relating to testing individuals who provide language access to state services.

Brief Description: Testing individuals who provide language access to state services.

Sponsors: Senators Saldaña, Nguyen, Nobles, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services: 1/24/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to administer and develop oral and written tests to ensure language access providers are fluent in English and a primary non-English language.
- Changes a requirement for when DSHS may offer spoken language interpreter testing.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Staff: Delika Steele (786-7486)

Background: The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Health Care Authority (HCA) provide equal access to social service and medical programs for all persons, including persons who have limited English proficiency. State law requires DSHS to ensure that bilingual services are provided to non-English speaking applicants for, or recipients of, public assistance. In community service offices, depending on the circumstances, DSHS may be required to employ bilingual personnel or contract with interpreters. DSHS must also provide interpreters at dependency hearings.

DSHS certifies, authorizes, and qualifies language access providers as needed to maintain

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an adequate pool of providers. DSHS will only offer spoken language interpreter testing under certain circumstances. One of these circumstances is when 10 percent or more of the requests for interpreter services in the prior year for DSHS employees and the health care authority on behalf of limited English-speaking applicants and public assistance recipients went unfilled.

Summary of Bill: DSHS must administer and develop oral and written tests in accordance with established standards to ensure all language access providers are fluent in English and a primary non-English language. Testing must include evaluation of language competence, interpreting performance skills, understanding of the interpreter's role, and knowledge of DSHS policies regarding confidentiality, accuracy, impartiality, and neutrality.

DSHS will offer spoken language interpreter testing to individuals speaking languages where 10 percent or more of the statewide requests for interpreter services went unfilled through any of the procurement processes in the prior year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 18, 2023.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.