



March 19, 2026

The Honorable Susan R. Donovan, Chair
House Committee on Health & Human Services
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H 7931 — AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY — LICENSING OF HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Chair Donovan and Members of the House Committee on Health & Human Services:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we strongly support **H 7931**. This bill strengthens language access in hospitals and freestanding emergency-care facilities by requiring a **certified interpreter** for non-English speaking patients when an appropriate bilingual clinician is not available, with a limited exception allowing a qualified interpreter only when certification for a specific language does not exist. The bill also establishes clearer requirements for multilingual notices and written translation of vital documents, requires staff training on how to access interpreter services, and calls for regular language needs assessments.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public systems work for everyone. United Way operates Rhode Island's **211 and ADRC** helplines —where we see firsthand that multilingual service delivery and reliable interpretation remove barriers, connect families to services faster, and support healthier, more stable communities.

Qualitative evidence from our 211 & ADRC resource specialists demonstrate that language barriers in health care can reduce quality and contribute to adverse outcomes, including medical errors—especially for people with limited English proficiency. Research also shows that trained, professional interpreters improve patient satisfaction, quality of care, and outcomes compared to ad hoc interpretation.

By strengthening expectations for certified interpretation, requiring visible multilingual notices, aligning written translation thresholds to established federal safe harbor standards referenced in the bill, and ensuring providers are trained to access interpretation services, Rhode Island can improve the reliability and consistency of language access across settings. These changes will help ensure patients can understand their care, make informed decisions, and receive timely treatment—regardless of the language they speak.

United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for **H 7931**. Improving language access is a direct investment in equitable health care, patient safety, and stronger outcomes for Rhode Island families.



Sincerely,

Elijah McLean
Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island