Good morning, Chairperson Lyons and members of the committee.

My name is Ita Meno. I live and work in Burlington, at the City of Burlington - Burlington Electric Department.

I'm here in support of S.243, and to speak to why translated audio and video should be understood as emergency communications infrastructure, not outreach or optional services.

When emergencies happen in Vermont, power outages, extreme cold, flooding, heat, public health alerts, the challenge is rarely whether information exists. The challenge is whether it reaches people fast enough, clearly enough, and in a format they trust and can act on.

English-only written notices assume time, literacy, and familiarity with government systems. Many Vermonters do not have those assumptions met. Elders, recent arrivals, young folks and people whose first language is not written English often rely on spoken communication. For them, audio and video in their primary language are not enhancements. They are THE delivery mechanism.

From an operational perspective, this is about speed and risk reduction.

During outages or extreme weather, we need residents to understand safety guidance immediately. Where to go if they lose heat. How to avoid unsafe generators or space heaters. When power restoration or other support can be expected. Delays or misunderstandings translate directly into preventable harm.

During the July 2023 flooding, information was changing hour by hour. Road closures, boil-water notices, shelter locations. Written updates were available, but many people did not receive or trust them in time. Community-based audio and video messaging in multiple languages helped fill that gap by reaching people through channels they already relied on, quickly and clearly.

Emergency management best practice encourages redundant and accessible communication across multiple formats and languages. It is a core principle for reducing harm and improving compliance during rapidly evolving events.

Burlington Electric works directly with the Vermont Language Justice Project to put this into practice. Together, we've produced translated video content on weatherization that is being shared across the state and will be shared nationally this Spring, and an "Understanding Your Electric Bill" video that is now being shared and mimicked nationally. We are currently developing additional translated videos on heating and cooling and alternatives to personal, internal combustion engine transportation.

The Vermont Language Justice Project has built a capacity that is still rare nationally. They can rapidly produce accurate, culturally grounded audio and video in many languages, including languages that are primarily spoken. Their distribution network is just as valuable. We have seen information fly through trusted community networks, schools, health systems, and digital platforms.

That trust cannot be created during an emergency. It has to exist beforehand.

Preparedness is about having systems that are ready to deploy under pressure. S.243 recognizes that you cannot build those systems in the middle of a crisis. You can only use what already exists.

This bill strengthens Vermont's emergency readiness by investing in proven infrastructure. One that reduces confusion, speeds response, and improves outcomes across public health, emergency management, and community safety.

Thank you for your time, and for your commitment to making sure life-saving information reaches all Vermonters when it matters.