Testimony for S.243 Feb 5th 2026
Alison Segar Director VLJP

Good morning
My name is Alison Segar and I am the founder and director of the Vermont Language Justice Project.

I launched the Vermont Language Justice Project almost 6 years ago in response to the COVID pandemic when it became very clear that emergency communication and accurate health information was not reaching communities of people with language access needs which as we all know are some of the most vulnerable and most isolated people in Vermont.

Vermont has a history of welcoming newcomers to the state as refugees, immigrants, migrants and asylees and this diverse group of individuals and families speak a multitude of languages, some written some not. VLJP produced videos on all aspects of covid, on a shoe string budget, using accurate and scientific facts sought from the Vermont department of health website and the cdc

In November 2021 we were fortunate to receive a CDC racial disparities grant through the Vermont Department of Health and I began to develop a small team over the next few years so that VLJP could continue to produce and expand on our lifesaving health information in video format in collaboration with community partners and the Vt Dept of health. This included a multitude of videos about covid and covid testing, videos on vaccinations, their importance and how they work, videos on Mpox, preventing mosquito bites, videos about keeping yourself safe during flooding, hot weather, cold weather, cyanobacteria, wild fires, tics and so many more.

All these videos were made in anywhere from 10 to 21 of the languages commonly spoken in Vermont and as I said earlier were made in collaboration with the Vermont Department of Health.
We have also worked with other state departments as well as community partners and UVMMC and Brattleboro Hospital. We have produced videos on mental health concerns, know your rights with ICE and the Border

Patrol, videos on autism, latent TB, maternal child health warming signs, mammograms, drugs and alcohol concerns, accessing and paying for childcare in Vermont, Cervical Cancer, Climate Change, the ER and so many more. In total we have produced over 220 unique videos each one in up to 21 languages. We have had over 409,000 views, have over 2700 subscribers to our youtube channel and developed an app for iphones and androids where all our videos can be accessed in 18 of our languages, including ASL. Since our grant from the CDC ended abruptly in January 2025, VLJP is now solely funded by donations from individuals and foundations, and fee for service work.

On October 30th 2025, the Vermont Language Justice Project was asked to support Hunger Free Vermont in their outreach to Vermonters with language access needs, to create a video explaining the details of the impending cuts to SNAP benefits that would occur two days later, on November 1st. Within 36 hours VLJP had produced 17 informational videos in 17 languages about the cuts to SNAP benefits and how the State of Vermont was going to provide the benefits for the first 15 days of November. The playlist was immediately put out on social media and within the day had received over 4000 hits. The same day the playlist was sent to task force colleagues (over 80 organisations) and the audio files were sent to the Winooski and Burlington School district for distribution through their robocall phone system. By the end of the weekend our videos had been viewed over 500 times.

In case of emergency Vljp is able to respond to a crisis usually within 24 hours with information in multiple languages in multiple formats, translations, audio files and videos. We use our wide distribution network to push the information out to people with language access needs throughout the entire State of Vermont.

I know I can say that no other organization can do this in Vermont, and maybe no other organisation can do or does this in the United States. As an aside we do not use AI, but work with community leaders who understand the nuances of what we are saying and have wide outreach to their communities.

I recently saw on social media that there is a rise in Whooping cough in Vermont. The VDH website said back in November

“ Whooping cough is spreading in Caledonia, Lamoille and Washington Counties. “ The VDH recommends that people in the impacted counties take extra steps to protect themselves and their community.
The Website then goes on to explain what these extra steps are, in a lot of detail, which is great…. but its only in English.

I believe that had our CDC grant still been in existence we would have made a video in multiple languages and got this information quickly and efficiently to folks throughout the state of Vermont. Instead I had to apply for a grant through a foundation to make the video. We are still waiting to hear if we get the grant.

We do not know what health issues are going to be hitting our communities in the next year. However we do know that there have already been 588 cases of measles in the USA since January 1st which is over 25 percent of all cases from the whole of 2025. It is that time of year that many of us remember the beginning of covid and how terrifying it was and how we had to search out scientifically accurate information so we could keep ourselves and our families safe.

We appreciate and thank Senator Gulick in introducing S.243, which proposes to require the Department of Health to distribute funds to the Vermont Language Justice Project for the creation of informational materials related to a disease outbreak or other public health emergency with a $150,000 appropriation. The State of Vermont needs to be **prepared** for the next health emergency, whatever that might be ensuring that all residents are informed in a manner that is linguistically appropriate. When it comes to health, we know that time can be of the essence. VLJP has already done the extensive groundwork to be ready for whatever comes next. We know that our work saves lives, by informing all of our communities of diverse language speakers throughout Vermont and we hope that you will support S.243 and it will move through the senate for funding.