
IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

To provide greater access and participation in public services, programs, and activities for residents of the District of Columbia with limited or no-English proficiency by requiring that District government programs, departments, and services assess the need for, and offer, oral language services; provide written translations of documents into any non-English language spoken by a limited or no-English proficient population that constitutes 3% or 500 individuals, whichever is less, of the population served or encountered, or likely to be served or encountered; to ensure that District government programs, departments, and services with major public contact establish and implement a language access plan and designate a language access coordinator; to require that the Office of Human Rights coordinate and supervise District government programs, departments, and services in complying with the provisions of this act and establish the position of Language Access Director for this purpose; and to amend the District of Columbia Latino Community Development Act and to repeal the Bilingual Services Translation Act of 1977 to repeal redundant provisions.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this act may be cited as the "Language Access Act of 2004".

Sec. 2. Definitions.

For purposes of this act, the term:

(1) "Access or participate" means to be informed of, participate in, and benefit from public services, programs, and activities offered by a covered entity at a level equal to English proficient individuals.

(2) "Covered entity" means any District government agency, department, or program that furnishes information or renders services, programs, or activities directly to the public or contracts with other entities, either directly or indirectly, to conduct programs, services, or activities. The term "covered entity" shall not include the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions.

(3)(A) “Covered entity with major public contact” means a covered entity whose primary responsibility consists of meeting, contracting, and dealing with the public.

(B) Covered entities with major public contact are:

- (i) Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration;
- (ii) Department of Health;
- (iii) Department of Mental Health;
- (iv) Department of Human Services;
- (v) Department of Employment Services;
- (vi) Fire and Emergency Medical Services;
- (vii) District of Columbia Housing Authority;
- (viii) District of Columbia general ambulatory and emergency care

centers;

- (ix) Emergency Management Agency;
- (x) Metropolitan Police Department;
- (xi) District of Columbia Public Schools;
- (xii) Department of Motor Vehicles;
- (xiii) Department of Housing and Community Development;
- (xiv) Department of Public Works;
- (xv) Department of Corrections;
- (xvi) Office on Aging;
- (xvii) District of Columbia Public Library;
- (xviii) Department of Parks and Recreation ;
- (xix) Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs ;
- (xx) Child and Family Services Agency;
- (xxi) Office of Human Rights;
- (xxii) Office of Personnel;
- (xxiii) Office of Planning;
- (xxiv) Office of Contracting and Procurement;
- (xxv) Office of Tax and Revenue; and
- (xxvi) Office of the People’s Counsel.

(C) Other covered entities with major public contact may be designated by the Language Access Director through the Mayor, by regulation, after consultation with the D. C. Language Access Coalition in accordance with section 6(b)(6).

(4) “Language Access Director” means the official in the Office of Human Rights who, pursuant to section 6, coordinates and supervises the activities of District agencies, departments, and programs undertaken to comply with the provisions of this act.

(5) “Limited or no-English proficiency” means the inability to adequately understand or to express oneself in the spoken or written English language.

(6) “Oral language services” means the provision of oral information necessary

to enable limited or no-English proficiency residents to access or participate in programs or services offered by a covered entity. The term “oral language services” shall include placement of bilingual staff in public contact positions; the provision of experienced and trained staff interpreters; contracting with telephone interpreter programs; contracting with private interpreter services; and using interpreters made available through community service organizations that are publicly funded for that purpose.

(7) “Vital documents” means applications, notices, complaint forms, legal contracts, and outreach materials published by a covered entity in a tangible format that inform individuals about their rights or eligibility requirements for benefits and participation. The term “vital documents” shall include tax-related educational and outreach materials produced by the Office of Tax and Revenue, but shall not include tax forms and instructions.

Sec. 3. Oral language services provided by covered entities.

(a) A covered entity shall provide oral language services to a person with limited or no-English proficiency who seeks to access or participate in the services, programs, or activities offered by the covered entity.

(b) A covered entity shall, at least annually, determine the type of oral language services needed based upon:

(1) The number or proportion of limited or no-English proficient persons of the population served or encountered, or likely to be served or encountered by the covered entity, in the District of Columbia;

(2) The frequency with which limited or no-English proficient individuals come into contact with the covered entity;

(3) The importance of the service provided by the covered entity; and

(4) The resources available to the covered entity.

(c)(1) In making the determination under subsection (b) of this section of the type of oral language services needed, the covered entity shall consult the following sources of data to determine the languages spoken and the number or proportion of limited or no-English proficient persons of the population that are served or encountered, or likely to be served or encountered, by the covered entity in the District of Columbia:

(A) The United States Census Bureau’s most current report entitled “Language Use and English Ability, Linguistic Isolation” (or any other successor report);

(B) Any other language-related information;

(C) Census data on language ability indicating that individuals speak English “less than very well”;

(D) Local census data relating to language use and English language ability;

(E) Other governmental data, including intake data collected by covered entities; data collected by the District of Columbia Public Schools; and data collected by and

made available by District government offices that conduct outreach to communities with limited-English proficient populations and that serve as a liaison between the District government and limited-English proficient populations, such as the Office of Latino Affairs and the Office of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs; and

(F) Data collected and made available by the D.C. Language Access Coalition.

(2) A covered entity shall annually collect data about the languages spoken and the number or proportion of limited or no-English proficient persons speaking a given language in the population that is served or encountered, or likely to be served or encountered, by the covered entity. A covered entity's databases and tracking applications shall contain fields that will capture this information during the fiscal year that this act takes effect with respect to the covered entity pursuant to section 7. If it is demonstrated to the Office of Human Rights that this is not feasible due to budgetary constraints, a covered entity shall make all due efforts to comply with this paragraph by the beginning of the next fiscal year. All information collected under this section shall be provided to the Language Access Director and made available to the public, upon request, within a reasonable time.

(d) To the extent that a covered entity requires additional personnel to meet its requirement to provide oral language services based on the determination set forth in this section, the covered entity shall hire bilingual personnel into existing budgeted vacant public contact positions.

Sec. 4. Written language services by covered entity.

(a) A covered entity shall provide translations of vital documents into any non-English language spoken by a limited or no-English proficient population that constitutes 3% or 500 individuals, whichever is less, of the population served or encountered, or likely to be served or encountered, by the covered entity in the District of Columbia.

(b) If the provisions of this act are contractually imposed on a non-covered entity, subsection (a) of this section shall apply.

Sec. 5. Additional obligations of covered entities with major public contact.

(a)(1) A covered entity with major public contact shall establish a language access plan, by regulation.

(2) Each language access plan shall be established in consultation with the Language Access Director, the D.C. Language Access Coalition, the entity's language access coordinator, and agency directors that conduct outreach to limited or no-English populations. Each language access plan shall be updated every 2 years and shall set forth, at minimum, the following:

(A) The types of oral language services that the entity will provide and how the determination was reached;

(B) The titles of translated documents that the entity will provide and how the determination was reached;

(C) The number of public contact positions in the entity and the number of bilingual employees in public contact positions;

(D) An evaluation and assessment of the adequacy of the services to be provided; and

(E) A description of the funding and budgetary sources upon which the covered entity intends to rely to implement its language access plan.

(3) In establishing and updating the language access plan, the entity shall consult with the sources of data set forth in section 3(c)(1).

(b) A covered entity with major public contact shall designate a language access coordinator who shall report directly to the director of the entity and shall:

(1) Establish and implement the entity's language access plan in consultation with the Language Access Director, the D.C. Language Access Coalition, and the agency directors of government offices that conduct outreach to communities with limited or no-English proficient populations; and

(2) Conduct periodic public meetings with appropriate advance notice to the public.

(c) A covered entity with major public contact shall develop a plan to conduct outreach to communities with limited or no-English proficient populations about their language access plans and about the benefits and services to be offered under this act.

Sec. 6. Language access oversight; duties of Language Access Director.

(a) The Office of Human Rights shall provide oversight, central coordination, and technical assistance to covered entities in their implementation of the provisions of this act and ensure that the provision of services by covered entities meets acceptable standards of translation or interpretation.

(b) There shall be within the Office of Human Rights a Language Access Director to coordinate activities under this act. The Language Access Director shall:

(1) Review and monitor each covered entity's language access plan for compliance with this act and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, approved July 2, 1964 (78 Stat. 252; 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d through 2000d-7);

(2) Track, monitor, and investigate public complaints regarding language access violations at covered entities, and where necessary, issue written findings of noncompliance to the covered entities regarding failures to provide language access; provided, that this responsibility shall not supersede or preclude the existing individual complaint process and mechanism under the jurisdiction of the Office of Human Rights;

(3) Review and monitor the language access coordinators with respect to their performance of responsibilities under this act;

(4) Consult with language access coordinators, the D.C. Language Access Coalition, and the heads of government offices that conduct outreach to communities with limited or no-English proficient populations;

(5) Serve as the language access coordinator for the Office of Human Rights;

and

(6) Through the Mayor, by regulation, after consultation with the D.C. Language Access Coalition, designate additional covered entities with major public contact.

Sec. 7. Phased implementation.

(a) This act shall apply on its effective date to:

- (1) Department of Health;
- (2) Department of Human Services;
- (3) Department of Employment Services;
- (4) Metropolitan Police Department;
- (5) District of Columbia Public School System;
- (6) Office of Planning;
- (7) Fire and Emergency Medical Services; and
- (8) Office of Human Rights.

(b) This act shall apply as of October 1, 2004 to:

- (1) Department of Housing and Community Development;
- (2) Department of Mental Health;
- (3) Department of Motor Vehicles;
- (4) Child and Family Services Agency;
- (5) Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration; and
- (6) Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs.

(c) This act shall apply as of October 1, 2005, to:

- (1) Department of Parks and Recreation;
- (2) Office on Aging;
- (3) District of Columbia Public Library;
- (4) Office of Personnel;
- (5) Office of Contracting and Procurement;
- (6) Department of Corrections;
- (7) Department of Public Works; and
- (8) Office of Tax and Revenue.

(d) This act shall apply as of October 1, 2006 to all covered entities.

Sec. 8. Conforming amendments.

(a) Section 304 of the District of Columbia Latino Community Development Act, effective September 29, 1976 (D.C. Law 1-86; D.C. Official Code § 2-1314), is repealed.

(b) The Bilingual Translation Services Act of 1977, effective October 26, 1977 (D.C. Law 2-31; D.C. Official Code § 2-1342 *et seq.*), is repealed.

Sec. 9. Inclusion in the budget and financial plan.

This act shall take effect subject to the inclusion of its fiscal effect in an approved budget and financial plan. This act is subject to appropriations.

Sec. 10. Fiscal impact statement.

The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal impact statement required by section 602(c)(3) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(3)).

Sec. 11. Effective date.

This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of Congressional review as provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 831; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of Columbia Register.

Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia

Mayor
District of Columbia