



# **LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN**

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**Office of the City Secretary**

**January 31, 2014**

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## PURPOSE

On July 31, 2013, Mayor Annise Parker signed Executive Order 1-17 under the authority of Article VI, Section 7a, of the City Charter of the City of Houston. The order mandates all City Departments to establish policies for providing information about City services, programs, and activities to residents and visitors with limited English language proficiency (LEP).

The language access order calls for the translation of essential public information into five languages other than English for which there is the greatest need among Houston residents. The Office of International Communities, which oversees the project, will conduct a data-driven language needs assessment, working closely with City Departments, the international community leaders, stakeholders, and university-based experts to identify the five languages that will be adopted into the plan.

The language access executive order is aligned with Mayor Parker's commitment to strengthening the city's economy and improving the quality of life for all Houstonians.

In addition to the mandate presented by Executive Order 1-17, federal precedents exist for the provision of language access services and which are relevant to the City. The two main legal bases for language access are Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin, and 2000's Executive Order 13166, which affirms Title VI's language access requirement and outlines additional requirements. Any entity receiving federal support, even indirectly, is required to provide language access. Moreover, Title VI applies to a recipient's entire program or activity. This means all parts of a recipient's operations are covered, regardless of whether the recipient is only partially funded through federal funds. Language access requirements are therefore relevant to a wide variety of programs, services and activities provided by Houston city agencies.<sup>1</sup>

As per the requirements of Executive Order 1-17, the Office of the City Secretary has prepared this Language Access Plan ("LAP" or "Plan") in order to create a set of protocols for providing meaningful access to the Office of the City Secretary services, programs, and activities (both written and orally communicated) to LEP individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Order 13166 can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2000-08-16/pdf/00-20938.pdf> and related guidance on implementation of the federal Executive Order can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2002-06-18/pdf/02-15207.pdf>

# OFFICE OF THE CITY SECRETARY INFORMATION

## About the Office of the Office of the City Secretary

The City Secretary shall be the clerk or secretary of the council, whose duty it shall be to act as reading and recording clerk to the council and to certify the correctness of the minutes and the journals and to perform such other duties as may be required by the city council and the mayor.

The duties of the City Secretary shall be to keep, record and preserve the minutes and proceedings of the City Council, and to be custodian of all the papers and records of the council proceedings of the city, with power to make certificates of any proceedings of the City Council, to affix the city seal thereto, and to do and perform all things and acts usually done or necessary to be performed by secretaries or clerks of cities in connection with the business thereof.

In addition to the duties herein mentioned, the City Secretary shall do and perform such other duties, acts and things as may be required of him or her by the mayor or City Council.

## Contact Information:

### **Director**

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## KEY DEFINITIONS

**Essential Public Information:** As per the Executive Order, “Essential Public Information” is any information developed or used by the department and deemed vital for purposes of public safety, public health, and economic development. This term is used interchangeably with the term “vital documents.”

**Executive Order 1-17:** This is a policy directive signed by the Mayor that mandates all City departments to establish policies for providing information about City services, programs, and activities to residents and visitors with limited English language proficiency (LEP).

**Interpretation & Translation:** Taken verbatim from the US Department of Homeland Security’s 2012 Language Access plan<sup>2</sup>: “Interpretation involves *oral* communication. Translation involves *written* communication.

Interpretation involves the immediate communication of meaning from one language into another. An interpreter conveys meaning orally; as a result, interpretation requires skills different from those needed for translation. Interpreting is a complex task that combines several abilities beyond language competence in order to enable delivery of an effective professional interpretation in a given setting. From the standpoint of the user, a successful interpretation is one that faithfully and accurately conveys the meaning of the source language orally, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source message, without omissions, additions, or embellishments on the part of the interpreter. Professional interpreters are subject to specific codes of conduct and should be trained in interpretive skills, ethics, and subject-matter language.

DHS Components utilizing the services of interpreters should request information about certification, assessments taken, qualifications, experience, and training. Interpreters may be physically present, or, in appropriate circumstances, may appear via videoconferencing or telephonically. When videoconferencing or telephonic interpretation are used, options include connecting directly to a specific professional interpreter with known qualifications, or using a company that provides telephonic interpretation services and has in place quality control and privacy safeguards.

If bilingual staff is asked to interpret or translate, staff should be qualified to do so. Assessment of ability, training on interpreter ethics and standards, and clear policies, as noted below, that delineate appropriate use of bilingual staff, or contract interpreters and translators, will help ensure quality and effective use of resources.”<sup>3</sup>

**iSpeak Cards:** These are cards that can be used to help an LEP individual obtain interpretive services. LEP’s are instructed to go online to find their language and print them. They can insert their name on the blank line on both the English and the non-English language statements. They then cut along the border lines, place back-to-back with adhesive (glue or paste), and laminate

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<sup>2</sup> Definition available on pages 2 and 3 of US Department of Homeland Security February 2011 Language Access Plan, available at: [http://www.lep.gov/guidance/040312\\_crcl-dhs-language-access-plan.pdf](http://www.lep.gov/guidance/040312_crcl-dhs-language-access-plan.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this language access plan, the term “DHS Components” in the definition can be substituted for “Agencies”

the card. They can keep these cards in their wallet to be used to help them get interpretive services when needed. You can access iSpeak cards at many online resources, including: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/civilrights/PG584.htm>

**iSpeak Houston:** This is the designee for all language access activities in the City of Houston. As a part of the Department of Neighborhoods, iSpeak Houston oversees the City of Houston Language Access Task Force and liaisons with the City departments through the Language Access Coordinators, who also serve as members of the task force. In addition to serving as the hub for all language access activities, iSpeak Houston offers language access technical support and services to City of Houston staff.

**Language Access Coordinator:** These individuals are responsible for devising and ensuring that the City department they represent is in compliance with the Mayor's Executive Order 1-17, and that their department adheres to its language access policy directives, plan and procedures to provide meaningful access to LEP persons. They also represent their department on the City of Houston Language Access Task Force.

**Language Line/Telephone Interpreting:** This is a service that connects human interpreters via telephone to individuals who wish to speak to each other but do not share a common language. The telephone interpreter converts the spoken language from one language to another, enabling listeners and speakers to understand each other. Interpretation over the telephone most often takes place in **consecutive mode**, which means that the interpreter waits until the speaker finishes an **utterance** before rendering the interpretation into the other language. Telephone interpreting is one modality or delivery mechanism for providing interpreting services. Other forms of delivering interpreting services include in-person interpreting and video interpreting for the deaf and hard of hearing. For the City of Houston, the service can be accessed through the 3-11 service help line at no cost to constituents. Departments that utilize the service line, however, will be assessed a fee for utilizing the service. Fees are charged by the minute, and fees per language may differ.

**Limited English Proficient (LEP):** For the purposes of this plan and the activities to be undertaken in its execution, an LEP individual is someone who is not able to speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with Department staff. Individuals maintain the right to self-identify as a LEP person and should not in any circumstances be expected to pay for translation or interpretation services in order to effectively communicate with the Department.

## LANGUAGES COVERED

Executive Order 1-17 mandates City agencies to provide essential public information in a *minimum* of the City's top five languages spoken by LEP individuals. Given the particular nature of interaction, both orally and in writing, the City Secretary's Office has determined that the following languages will be covered for translation and interpretation services:

- Spanish
- Vietnamese
- Chinese
- Arabic
- Urdu

The top five languages in the above list might not necessarily cover the languages of all individuals seeking programs, services, and activities from the Office of the City Secretary. In an effort to avoid the misperception of unequal services or uneven coverage of language access services to communities who speak languages not identified in the list, the Office of the City Secretary will follow the City-wide protocol for handling LEP individuals.

If a request is made for an essential document that is not available in the above list of languages, when feasible, the Office of the City Secretary will utilize the City-wide translation vendor to translate the requested essential document. The decision to translate the document will be determined by the Office of the City Secretary director, or his/her language access representative.

The selection for the five languages was approved by the Mayor. The data is from the U.S. Census/American Language Survey. The list of languages with selection rational by the Houston Planning Office of the City Secretary is found in the Appendix.

## **LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES**

The sections describes how the Office of the City Secretary will determine what information is considered essential/vital, and how it will provide translation/interpretation services of that information. A list of essential documents can be found in the Appendix.

### **Translation of Essential Public Information Criteria**

The City Secretary will determine what constitutes “Essential Public Information” and “Vital Documents.”

### **Implementing Translation of Essential Information**

In order to translate the essential public information outlined in the section above, the Office of the City Secretary will use the City’s approved vendor for translation/interpretation services in accordance with procedures set out by the administration.

### **Interpretation Services**

Where the Office of the City Secretary conducts in-person or telephonic or otherwise orally-communicated business with the community, it will provide, when feasible, interpretation services for LEP individuals. It plans to do so by following the City’s Administrative Procedure for handling LEP individuals. Refer to the Appendix for a copy of the Administrative Procedure.

### **Monitoring, Evaluation & Documentation**

In order to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the Office of the City Secretary translation/interpretation plan, the Office of the City Secretary will maintain records of all service requests received for written translation services, on-site interpretation services, and over-the-phone interpretation services.

## **REPORTING REQUIREMENTS & EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

### **Reporting Requirements**

Per the Executive Order:

- 7.5.1 All Coordinators shall report plan progress, assessments and recommendations periodically to Office of the City Secretary heads and the Mayor’s designee.
- 7.5.2 The Mayor’s Designee will establish a reporting format, report submission interval and technical assistance to Office of the City Secretary. Reporting logistics should be established within 6 months of this Executive Order.
- 7.5.3 The Mayor’s Designee will work with the Coordinators to develop protocols used to measure the progress by the Office of the City Secretary, as well as by feedback from

the public constituencies with limited English proficiency served by the City Office of the City Secretary.

Office of the City Secretary will collect findings using the tool located provided by iSpeak Houston.

### **Staff Training**

Per the Executive Order:

- All employees who routinely have direct, substantive interaction with the public (front-line employees) shall be trained in language access policies and procedures that shall include protocols for assisting LEP populations. Training shall be provided by the Mayor's designee.
- The Office of the City Secretary will comply with all training requirements.

## APPROVAL SIGNATURE PAGE

The Office of the City Secretary's Language Access Plan was approved on January 31, 2014, and was submitted on the same day to the Administration as required by Executive Order 1-17.

### Office of the City Secretary Leadership:



Anna Russell  
Office of the City Secretary Director

Date

2-7-14

## APPENDIX

## **TOP FIVE LANGUAGES OF NEED SPOKEN IN HOUSTON**

# Ability to Speak English “Less Than Very Well” in City of Houston



**PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT**

Source: 2012 American Community Survey,  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Date: January 17, 2014

## Introduction

Data on ‘Language spoken at home by Ability to Speak English’ were derived from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. The data includes only population 5 years and over who have the ability to speak a language. This data is collected in an effort to measure the current use of languages other than English. The ACS collects information from a large annual sample of approximately 3 million housing unit addresses and therefore provides more reliable statistics. The usefulness of the self-rated English-speaking ability question was established in the 1980s.

Respondents were instructed to print the name of the non-English language spoken at home. If the person spoke more than one language other than English, the person was to report the language spoken more often.

## City of Houston

English-speaking ability varied widely among the speakers of the top ten languages spoken in the City of Houston. The top ten languages spoken in Houston are: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, French or Creole, Urdu, Arabic, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines) and Korean.

The Census Bureau distinguishes the ability to speak English between “Very Well” and “Less Than Very Well”. In Houston, the “Less Than Very Well” category ranked numerically are, Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, Korean, French or Creole, Hindi, and Tagalog (Philippines). Those who speak “Less Than Very Well” category varies between 397,429 persons (Spanish) being the highest and 1,551 persons (Philippines-Tagalog) being the lowest. The higher proportion indicates that they have a huge difficulty in conveying information clearly in English from normal conversations to obtaining assistance from non-profit organizations, Government etc.

**Recommended 5 Languages based on numerical rank are (Speak English “Less than Very Well”): Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic and Urdu.**

## Language Spoken at Home (Other than English) City of Houston

	Speak English "Less Than Very Well"	Speak English "Very Well"	Total
Spanish or Creole	397,429	332,099	729,528
Vietnamese	21,584	11,701	33,285
Chinese	13,521	10,765	24,286
Arabic	3,324	5,256	8,580
Urdu	2,783	5,090	7,873
Korean	2,498	2,174	4,672
French or Creole	2,486	7,959	10,445
Hindi	2,041	6,162	8,203
Tagalog (Philippines)	1,551	5,434	6,985

## **ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY & PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING LEPS**

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