



What is the D.C. Language Access Act?

The Language Access Act of 2004 was enacted by Mayor Anthony A. Williams on April 21, 2004. The Act's purpose is 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 (LEP/NEP).

The Act requires four things from District government programs, departments and services with major public contact. These four things include:

- Assessing the need for and offering oral language services;
- Providing written translation of vital documents into any non-English language spoken by an LEP/NEP 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 entity;
- Establishing and implementing a language access plan; and
- Identifying a language access coordinator.

Providing greater access and participation in public services, programs and activities for limited and no-English proficient residents of the District of Columbia.

D.C. Act 15-414

The D.C. Office of Human Rights has identified the following six languages as those languages largely served by the District government: Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, French, and Amharic.

The Act calls for a “phased implementation” of its provisions. This means that a cluster of District government programs, departments and services with major public contact are specifically named within the Act to be compliant with its provisions by the beginning of each fiscal year effective April 21, 2004.

The Office of Human Rights (OHR) is the agency designated by the Act to oversee the Language Access Program. The OHR provides central coordination and technical assistance to these government programs, departments and services with major public contact in their implementation of the Act. The OHR is also charged with tracking, monitoring and investigating public complaints of language access violations.

The OHR works in consultation with the Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs (OLA), the Mayor’s Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA), the Mayor’s Office on African Affairs (OAA), and the Language Access Coalition— an alliance of pro-immigrant community-based groups.

The Act’s “Phased Implementation”

The Act applied on its effective date to:

- Department of Health
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Employment Services
- Metropolitan Police Department
- District of Columbia Public School System
- Office of Planning
- Fire and Emergency Medical Services
- Office of Human Rights

The Act applies effective October 1, 2005 to:

- Department of Parks and Recreation
- Office on Aging
- District of Columbia Public Library
- D.C. Department of Human Resources
- Office of Contracting and Procurement
- Department of Corrections
- Department of Public Works
- Office of Tax and Revenue

The Act applied as of October 1, 2004 to:

- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Department of Mental Health
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- Child and Family Services Agency
- Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration
- Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs

The Act applies as of October 1, 2006 to:

- D.C. Housing Authority
- Office of the People’s Counsel
- Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency
- And to all covered entities