

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY**

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**Purpose**

To establish County-wide procedures for providing information or services directly to the public in a way that makes them accessible to persons who are not proficient in the English language.

**Background**

In an effort to close the significant gap in the provision of governmental services to limited-English language speakers, the County believes establishing this Language Access Policy is essential to the success of our mission to provide meaningful access to the limited English-speaking community to services, programs and activities offered by the County of San Diego.

**Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to establish effective guidelines for language access services within the County of San Diego. County Departments shall ensure the quality and accuracy of language access services provided by each Department as they are critical to providing limited English-speaking individuals with meaningful access to department programs and activities.

Furthermore, it is the intent of this policy to establish guidelines and procedures for providing effective communication between the County and its residents who have been potentially precluded from communicating with the County regarding their required services due to a language barrier.

The County shall provide Language Access Services for languages identified as having a Substantial Number of Limited English-Speaking Persons. All Language Access Services required to be provided pursuant to this Policy shall be provided by the County at no cost to the individual.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Language Access Services:** Services including translation or interpretation services for both verbal and written communication.

**Limited English-Speaking Person:** An individual who requests Language Access Services in one of the languages identified as a Substantial Number of Limited English-Speaking Persons.

**Interpretation:** The act of listening to a communication in one language (source language) and orally converting it to another language (target language) while retaining the same meaning.

**Translation:** The replacement of written text from one language (source language) into an equivalent written text in another language (target language).

**Substantial Number of Limited English-Speaking Persons:** At least 5,000 Limited English-Speaking County residents, who speak a shared language other than English. The County shall make this determination by referring to the best available data from the United States Census Bureau and shall notify Departments should any languages be added or removed.

**Procedure**

There are two primary types of language access assistance: oral and written.

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1. Written translation. All Departments shall take reasonable steps to prioritize translation of vital documents. Classification of a document as “vital” depends upon the importance of each program, information, encounter, or service involved, and the consequence to the individual if the information in question is not provided. The final determination of what documents are considered “vital” is left to the discretion of the individual department, and each department should establish a process for identifying and prioritizing these documents or texts for translation.

Documents that may be considered “vital” may include, but are not limited to, certain:

- i. Administrative complaints, release, or waiver forms;
- ii. Claim or application forms;
- iii. Public outreach or education materials (including web-based material);
- iv. Letters or notices pertaining to policies changes or updates;
- v. Written notices of rights, denial, loss, or decreases in benefits or services, or hearings;
- vi. Forms or written material related to individual rights;
- vii. Notices of community meetings or other community outreach;
- viii. Notices regarding the availability of language assistance services.

Departments must inform Limited English-speaking individuals of their eligibility for benefits, programs, and services in a language they understand. When communicating with Limited English-speaking individuals, departments should assess Language Access Services for all points of contact including telephone, in-person, mail, and electronic communication. Additionally, the County will provide translation for the following documents:

- i. Annual Report
- ii. Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report
- iii. Operational Plan Summary Document
- iv. Truth Act Forum Annual Report
- v. Special programs as determined by the Board of Supervisors and the Chief Administrative Office

When possible, all County websites will include a Google Translation component.

2. Oral interpretation. Interpretation services to Limited English-Speaking Persons may be provided as determined necessary by departments. Interpretation services can occur in-person, through a telephonic interpreter, or via internet or video interpreting.

During regularly scheduled Board of Supervisors’ meetings, oral interpretation services will be provided in Spanish for individual callers as requested.

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Additional languages identified as languages with a Substantial Number of Limited English-Speaking Persons in the County may be made available upon request to the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

Additionally, the County shall provide oral interpretation services for the following official annual County events:

- i. County Budget Hearings
- ii. TRUTH Act Forum
- iii. State of the County Address

Source-language should be faithfully rendered into the target language by conserving all the elements of the original message while accommodating the syntactic and semantic patterns of the target language.

Staff will receive training on: the content of this Language Access Policy; how to identify the need for language access services; working with a Limited English-Speaking Person; providing Language Access Service in a culturally sensitive manner; working with an interpreter; and interpretation best practices.

To ensure accuracy, staff are prohibited from using minor children to interpret, absent emergency circumstances. Clients shall be advised of client's right to an interpreter at no cost to the individual.

Signage will be posted in visible locations notifying individuals of the right to request an interpreter at no cost. Signage will be translated into the languages identified as having a substantial number of Limited English-Speaking Persons in the county.

**Responsible Departments**

- 1. Chief Administrative Office

**Sunset Date**

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-2027.

**References**

N/A

**Board Action**

11/17/2020 (27) - New