



NYIC 2021 State Priorities

Building Political Power and Guaranteed Civil Rights:

Language Access

The lack of language access is one of the most significant barriers New York's immigrant communities face to accessing critical State services. New York State took an important step toward expanding language access in 2011 when Governor Cuomo signed Executive Order No. 26, which orders all executive State agencies to translate vital documents into the six most common state languages ("statewide languages of translation") and to offer interpretation services to individuals in their primary language. However, even after the implementation of the Executive Order, significant language access barriers remain, many of which have been made even more apparent by COVID-19 and our statewide response to it. For New York to truly have a full and equitable recovery it must include our immigrant communities and without language access that is not possible.

Recommendations:

Enact Language Access legislation that codifies & expands on existing Executive Order 26 that includes a mechanism to respond to changing immigration trends and expands the number of statewide languages of translation. High quality data on language needs must be used to specify which languages need to be covered at the state-wide level and should be used to allow variances at the local level. If fully implemented, this would make the State a national leader in language access for immigrant communities.

Create a Community Legal Interpreter Bank modeled after a successful model in place in the District of Columbia since 2007 to increase the supply of trained, vetted immigration legal interpreters by committing funds to be provided to community-based nonprofit organizations.

Provide funding to create three Language Services Cooperatives to enable immigrant community-based organizations to develop and launch three language services worker-owned cooperative--for African languages of limited diffusion (LLDs), Asian LLDs, and indigenous Latin American LLDs.

The number of community members who speak any single LLD may be too small for a nonprofit immigration legal service provider to feasibly hire bilingual front-line workers to meet the demand. As a result, City-funded nonprofit immigration legal service providers, as well as City agencies, are overly dependent on telephonic interpretation services. These services are often less desirable than in-person interpretation, particularly for complex and sensitive cases where it is important to establish trust and rapport. Beyond nonprofit immigration legal services, language services worker co-ops could eventually help meet the demand for professional, high-quality language services in the courts, education, health care, and the private sector, while providing skilled employment and business ownership opportunities to immigrant communities.

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