



NYIC 2024 State Priorities

Building Political Power and Guaranteed Civil Rights:

Expanding Language Access

New York State has one of the largest immigrant populations in the nation, with more than 5.7 million New Yorkers speaking a language other than English in their homes from 2017 - 2021, according to the American Community Survey. Of these, about 2.5 million New Yorkers do not speak English proficiently, and often encounter hurdles in communicating with English speakers. Lack of language access is one of the most significant barriers New York's immigrant communities face to accessing critical government services ranging from finding employment or long-term and affordable housing, applying for identification cards or opening bank accounts, communicating with government or school officials, accessing health services or real-time life saving information, and more.

Despite enactment of a statewide Language Access policy, interpretation and translation services remain inconsistent across the state, particularly at the county level. The current law, codified April 2022 under [section 202-A](#) of the Executive Law, directs all 45 Executive State agencies to provide interpretation services, and translate vital agency documents into the top 12 most commonly spoken non-English languages (**Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Bengali, Yiddish, Haitian Creole, Korean, Italian, Arabic, Polish, French, Urdu**). However, due to lack of enforcement, political will and available resources, the implementation of language access plans has been deeply inadequate at certain agencies like the Department of Motor Vehicles.

In a state where there are more languages spoken than nations recognized by the United Nations, the need for in-person, real-time interpretation and translation services is higher than ever. Our government must invest adequate funding in the development of a bilingual state workforce to address the growing need for trained interpreters and translators.

Recommendations:

Secure commitment of \$10M to expand language access and build New York's bilingual workforce by funding the creation of a learning language justice cooperative. The State must invest and allocate funding to support the development of a learning cooperative to create a pipeline of language services professionals for hard-to-reach communities located in regional areas of the state. This is crucial to help improve the quality and availability of skilled, trained, and culturally competent interpreters and translators.

Pass the Language Access Expansion Act ([S.3381-A](#)/[A.7235](#)) to expand access to language services to regional areas by: directing county agencies to provide interpretation and translation services, including local languages to the statewide language list, and requiring public-facing county agencies such as the Department of Motor Vehicles and Department of Education to provide in-person interpretation.

Ensure the Office of Language Access (OLA) is accessible to community members and community-based organizations (CBOs) and Increase collaboration with the new Director to assist with implementation of the law, provide expertise and knowledge from community organizations interacting directly with immigrants, create a process to collect and report complaints and community feedback, as well as to provide regional language data and policy recommendations.

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