



**SEPA Mujer**

SERVICIOS PARA EL AVANCE DE LA MUJER  
SERVICES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

**Testimony for 2022 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Human Services  
Submitted by SEPA Mujer in support of Language Access Bill S5236A / A7428A  
February 2, 2022**

My name is Devon Hannan, and I am a social work intern with SEPA Mujer. SEPA Mujer is a non-profit organization that advocates for the well-being and success of immigrant women on Long Island. Through our work, we promote the rights of the Latina community, encouraging civic engagement and tackling the discrimination faced by immigrant women.

Thank you to the Assembly and Senate for the opportunity to participate in the Human Services budget hearing. We are testifying in support of Language Access Bill S5236A / A7428A to guarantee translated documents and interpretation services at state agencies across New York. As essential members of our community, immigrants deserve to receive services in their own language. The Latino population continues to grow on Long Island, representing 22% of Suffolk County residents. With growing segments of our communities speaking languages other than English, state agencies must ensure that Language Access Plans are in place to train staff on how to administer their services appropriately and fairly.

Below is the testimony of Gabriela Yanes, a member and volunteer with SEPA Mujer, expressing the critical need for language access at New York State agencies:

“Language and communication is crucial in our community. Not having documents translated to Spanish, like applications and information sheets, and not having Spanish interpreters in the institutions that should offer us some support is a big barrier that too often impacts us as Hispanics. It is not fair that Hispanics have to learn English, but state workers cannot be trained to learn Spanish to better communicate with us.

I had bad experiences accessing services in Spanish both at the Office of Social Services and the DMV. They treated me inhumanely. I arrived to my appointment at the DMV at the correct time to apply for a Learner’s Permit. I got in line and when I approached the worker to tell him I was there, he took me by the arm and brought me outside the office to fill out an application. The application was only in English. I filled out

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the application and tried to apply again, bringing all the necessary documents, but they made me go to the bank to ask for a bank statement from a previous year, which I didn't need. It was very frustrating the way they treated me, and all of this happened because they didn't have people who spoke Spanish or applications translated to Spanish.

In the Department of Social Services, I wanted to apply for food stamps but there was no one available who spoke English and who could help me fill out my application. They didn't care that I had to pay for a taxi and return three times so they could fill out an application and be able to see me. I had just experienced a domestic violence situation that left me alone with my two babies, one a year and a half and the other four months. It was so hard and frustrating for this to happen in my own community at a place that was supposed to help me.

As a result of these poor experiences that I had and the bad experiences of thousands of other Hispanic people in my community, it is incredibly necessary and important to pass the Language Access Bill S5236A / A7428A so we can access the services that are important to us and communicate in the way that is best for us."

On behalf of Gabriela and SEPA Mujer, I urge the State Legislature to guarantee language access to all state services for immigrant New Yorkers by passing and funding Language Access Bill S5236A / A7428A.

Thank you for your time and for listening to the voices of immigrant communities.

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