



New York State Legislature
Joint Legislative Budget Hearing - Human Services
Testimony from the New York Immigration Coalition

My name is Ivan Larios and I am the Long Island Manager of Organizing and Strategy for the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving member organizations. Thank you to Chairs and the members of the Senate and Assembly for convening this important hearing and allowing us the opportunity to submit testimony on our organization's budget and policy priorities for the fiscal year 2024, particularly Language Access expansion.

Last year, New York took an important step towards guaranteeing equal access to government services for Limited English Proficient (LEP) New Yorkers by codifying Executive Order 26.1 as part of the FY 2023 Enacted Budget. The Executive Order, signed in March 2021 by former Governor Cuomo, directed State agencies to provide for the translation of vital documents in the 10 most commonly spoken non-English languages. The current law expanded New York State's language access policy and directs all State agencies to provide interpretation services in any language with respect to the provision of agency services or benefits, 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). The new law took effect on July 1, 2022 with the launch of a new Office of Language Access.

While a great achievement, interpretation and translation services continue to be inconsistent at certain state agencies. This is largely due to the fact that under the new law, translation is only mandatory for the agencies under the jurisdiction of the Governor, instead of across all subdivisions of state and county government leaving out important agencies that many immigrants interact with like the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Education. Although many state agencies have begun translating agency documents, the translated documents are often insufficient, unavailable and inconsistent.

Moreover, the law excludes many regional language groups by not allowing counties to add at least three languages most spoken in a regional area. Western New York has large south asian, middle eastern and central african refugees. The language needs for these groups drastically differ from areas in the New York City metropolitan area. In addition, refugee populations vary from city to city in the upstate region in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany. Variations



needed in the New York City metropolitan area are virtually nonexistent or require less need in upstate areas (i.e. Yiddish, Polish, etc.) We must account for the population variances for major cities throughout the entire state.

On top of the expansion of language services, we are also advocating for the creation of a Community Interpreter Bank and the development of language services worker-owned cooperatives in immigrant communities. We propose that the State follow NYC's example in recognizing the importance of worker-owned cooperatives as a way to create community-controlled businesses, particularly in immigrant communities that may face barriers to traditional business ownership. We propose that the State fund immigrant community-based organizations to develop and launch three state wide language services worker-owned cooperatives—one for African Languages of Limited Diffusion (LLDs), one for Asian LLDs, and one for indigenous Latin American LLDs. The worker-owners of these cooperatives would be recruited and trained in interpretation and translation, and would be available to serve private clients as well as nonprofit and public clients through the Interpreter Bank.

On behalf of the New York Immigration Coalition, we look forward to both the passage and proper implementation of this legislation. The only way for New York to truly have a full and equitable recovery must include our immigrant communities and without language access that is not possible. We hope you will sign on and support our language access expansion ([S3381](#)).

Sincerely,

Ivan A. Larios
Long Island Manager of Organizing and Strategy
The New York Immigration Coalition