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**From:** New York Immigration Coalition  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 23, 2008 9:23 AM  
**Subject:** Immigrant Groups Win Landmark Language Access Policy in NYC

## Immigrant Groups Win Citywide Language Access Executive Order in New York City



Dear Friends,

### **We Made History!**

More than a decade of direct actions, legal work, research, community organizing, and coalition work have culminated in a major civil rights victory for millions of New Yorkers!

On July 22, 2008, Mayor Bloomberg and City Council Speaker Christine Quinn announced Executive Order 120, which ensures that all New Yorkers will have meaningful access to all city government programs and services, regardless of their English ability.

As a result, when New Yorkers go into any city government office, they'll be able to get important forms and information in at least six languages and get help in their language when they need it.

This is the most comprehensive executive order in the nation to address one of the most pervasive barriers preventing immigrants from receiving services, participating in programs, or interacting with government. It's a commitment to ensuring equal access and equal rights for the nearly two million New Yorkers who are still learning English.

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This landmark victory was made possible by the collective work and support of dozens of organizations and funders over the years, on a variety of fronts, including housing, education, health, and public benefits. Overcoming language barriers was the goal we all shared. This victory is testament to what we can accomplish by working together.

### **Highlights of Executive Order 120**

Under the provisions of the Order, ALL city government agencies will:

- Translate essential public documents and forms into the top six languages spoken in New York City;
- Provide interpretation services in at least the top six languages spoken in New York City;
- Post visible signs about the rights to interpretation and translation in all agency offices;
- Designate a language access coordinator and develop plans for complying with this Executive Order in the coming months; and
- Convey information in their materials using plain, nontechnical language.

And importantly, implementation and compliance oversight is placed under the Mayor's Office of Operations. Progress-or lack thereof-in implementing the Executive Order will be reflected in the annual Mayor's Management Report, which serves as a public report card on city agencies.

### **Years of Work Pay Off**

For over ten years, immigrant community members and advocates laid the groundwork for this landmark victory by continually drawing public attention to the need for language access at public agencies, public and private hospitals, and pharmacies.

In 1999, Make the Road New York and the New York Immigration Coalition filed a federal civil rights complaint against the City of New York for its failure to provide language access in the welfare system. We won this civil rights complaint, and a subsequent federal lawsuit on this issue, *Ramirez v. Giuliani*.

We organized dozens of direct actions in the ensuing years, including a thousand-person march over the Brooklyn Bridge to deliver letters to City Hall. With our partner organizations, we monitored New York City's Medicaid offices, public benefits offices, and public hospitals; we worked with the city and state to hold public hearings and conduct public investigations of communication barriers in Medicaid offices and hospitals; we drew media attention to the need for city agencies to improve communication with limited-English-proficient New Yorkers; and we never backed down.

As a result, in 2003, Local Law 73 was signed into law, requiring language access at the Human Resources Administration and ensuring equal access to vital government benefits like Medicaid, Food Stamps and public assistance. And in 2006, after a multi-year campaign that

included monitoring of hospitals, filing civil rights complaints, and putting pressure on legislators and industry groups, we won new state regulations requiring hospitals to provide interpreters to patients with limited English.

Inspired by those victories, immigrant parents stood up and said that in order for our children to succeed, parents need to be able to read report cards and communicate with teachers.

Immigrant parents delivered hundreds of report cards, written only in English, to the Department of Education, requesting translation. In 2006, after two years of legislative campaigns, petitions, press conferences and surveys, we secured a Chancellor's Regulation guaranteeing language access in the city's school system.

Next, a coalition of organizations came together to tackle language access in the city's housing agency. Our coalition worked with the City Council to draft Intro 596, the Equal Access to Housing Services Act. Since its introduction in 2006, Intro 596 has built momentum toward a citywide language access policy.

These successes were possible in part because of relentless monitoring, research and publication of numerous reports documenting the need for language access in various settings. Links to many of these groundbreaking reports can be found at the bottom of this email.

### **A Model for the Nation**

The Executive Order has implications far beyond New York City. By signing it, Mayor Bloomberg demonstrates New York City's exceptional leadership in enhancing customer service for all city residents, fighting national origin discrimination, and promoting civil rights. On the policy level, we hope that the comprehensive framework and language of the Executive Order will serve as a model for other localities pursuing similarly proactive policies. Politically, as the battles over immigration policy and the very principles that define our country continue around us, New York City is making a powerful statement: we are a city that welcomes and serves all New Yorkers.

¡Si se puede!

### **A Team Effort**

This victory was possible because of the hard work and dedication of the following groups:

#### Groups working with us on housing language access:

Asian Americans for Equality  
El Centro del Inmigrante  
CAAAY: Organizing Asian Communities  
Legal Services for New York City  
Make the Road New York  
Neighbors Helping Neighbors  
University Settlement

Urban Justice Center

Groups working with us on education language access:

Advocates for Children  
Asian Americans for Equality  
Chinese Progressive Association  
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families  
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families  
Comprehensive Development Inc.  
El Centro del Inmigrante  
Haitian-Americans United for Progress  
Make the Road New York  
Metropolitan Russian-American Parents Association  
South Asian Youth Action  
YWCA Flushing Branch

Groups working with us on health and public-benefits language access:

Arab-American Family Support Center  
Haitian-Americans United for Progress  
Korean Community Services  
The Legal Aid Society  
Legal Services for New York City  
Make the Road New York  
New York Legal Assistance Group  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest  
Reconciliation and Culture Cooperative Network  
Shorefront YM-YWHA of Brighton-Manhattan Beach

Published Reports on Language Access (by various authors):

[\*Bad Medicine\*](#)  
[\*Bad Start to the School Year\*](#)  
[\*Breaking the Barrier\*](#)  
[\*Denied at the Door\*](#)  
[\*From Translation to Participation\*](#)  
[\*Hear This\*](#)  
[\*Language Access to Health Care\*](#)  
[\*Living in Isolation\*](#)  
[\*Lost in Translation\*](#)  
[\*Medicaid Emergency\*](#)  
[\*Now We're Talking\*](#)  
[\*Policy or Pretense\*](#)  
[\*School Year Filled With Missed Communication\*](#)  
[\*Seen But Not Served\*](#)  
[\*Silenced Partners\*](#)  
[\*Translation Woes\*](#)

For more information on the executive order, see our [press release](#).

To support the NYIC, [click here](#).

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