

# Language Access Plan

Suffolk County

Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services



FRES Acting Commissioner, effective 9/28/18	John G. Jordan, Sr.
LAC Coordinator: Sylvia Murdolo, tel. 631-852-4950	11/8/2013, REVIEWED 11/8/17

## Suffolk County Government

### Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services

#### *Limited English Proficiency Plan*

**Effective Date of Plan: November 15, 2013**

**Language Access Coordinator (LAC): Sylvia Murdolo, Planning Aide**

**LAC Phone/E-Mail: (631) 852-4950 [sylvia.murdolo@suffolkcountyny.gov](mailto:sylvia.murdolo@suffolkcountyny.gov)**

#### I. Purpose

The Suffolk County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services (FRES) recognizes the importance of effective accurate communication between its personnel and the community that they serve. Language barriers can impede effective and accurate communication in a variety of ways. Language barriers can sometimes inhibit or even prohibit individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) from accessing and/or understanding important rights, obligations and services from communicating accurately and effectively in difficult situations. Hampered communications with LEP victims, witness and community members can present FRES with safety, evidentiary and ethical challenges. Ensuring maximum communication ability between our department and all segments of the community serves the interest of both.

The purpose of this plan is to comply with Suffolk County Executive Order 10-2012, dated November 9, 2012 (see [Attachment 1](#)) for departmental personnel to follow when providing services to, or interacting with, individuals who have limited English proficiency (LEP.) The plan is to be consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Presidential Executive Order 13166 (dated August 11, 2000) where federally-funded agencies must take reasonable steps to ensure that people who LEP have access to the recipient's programs and service.

#### II. Policy

FRES' policy is to take reasonable steps to provide timely, meaningful access to LEP persons to the services and benefits FRES provides in our programs or activities that are available to the general public. FRES' personnel will offer assistance where they can to LEP people whom they encounter or whenever an LEP individual requests language assistance services. Our primary interaction with the public is 9-1-1. The communications center is an enhanced 911 facility handling fire and EMS calls and dispatching units. The dispatchers must be New York State certified Emergency Medical Technicians to be hired and maintain national certification as Emergency Medical Dispatchers. These same Emergency Services Dispatchers are utilized to staff the mobile command post along with county fire marshals.

The County has identified the following six most common non-English languages spoken by individuals with limited English proficiency within Suffolk County: ***Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Italian, Portuguese and Haitian Creole.*** FRES expects that interpretations will be for all languages.

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FRES also maintains the Emergency Preparedness Registry (originally the JEEP/SpNs Registry) which serves to identify those residents that would need special accommodations in order to plan effectively in the event of an evacuation.

### III. Definitions

- Primary Language means an individual's native tongue or the language in which an individual most effectively communicates. FRES personnel should avoid assumptions about an individual's primary language as there are many languages with different dialects residing in Suffolk County. FRES personnel make every effort to ascertain an individual's primary language to ensure effective communications.
- Limited English Proficiency designates individuals whose primary language is not English and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English. LEP individuals may be competent in certain types of communication (e.g. speaking or understanding) but still be LEP for other purposes (e.g. reading or writing.) Similarly, LEP designations are context-specific: an individual may possess sufficient English language skills to function in one setting, but these skills may be insufficient in other situations.
- Interpretation is the act of listening to a communication in one language (source language) and orally converting it to another language (target language) while retaining the same meaning.
- Translation is the replacement of written text from one language (source language) into an equivalent written text in another language (target language.)
- Bilingual references the ability to use two languages proficiently.
- FRES Authorized Interpreter (FRES-AI) is a bilingual FRES employee who has been authorized to interpret for others in certain situations.
- FRES-AI List is an accounting of FRES personnel who are bilingual and are authorized to act as volunteer interpreters. We will create and maintain the list of bilingual personnel and have it available for FRES' LAC and Administration. (See [Attachment 2.](#))

### IV. Procedures for Accessing Interpretation Services

#### A. Civilian Emergency Calls to Fire/Rescue 9-1-1

1. 9-1-1 Communications with LEP Callers: When a 9-1-1 call taker receives a call and determines that the caller is LEP, the call taker will connect by phone with Language Lines.
2. Language Lines has been awarded the bid for its services to offer interpretative services to Suffolk County Government Agencies such as FRES.
3. The call taker will contact the contracted telephonic interpretation service directly. Once a three-way call is established between the call taker, the LEP caller and the interpreter, the call taker shall follow the standard operating procedures use for all 9-1-1 calls.

The demand for interpretation services experienced by the Department in calendar year 2012 was approximately 90% for Spanish. It has not been determined if other languages services have been requested at this time.

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Note:

The call taker will note in an appropriate field sent to dispatch that the 9-1-1 caller is an LEP individual and indicate the language, so that this information is provided to responding personnel. Dispatchers will make every effort to communicate which language so responders know ahead of time.

B. Provision of Language Assistance Services In-Person

1. Reception staff makes the determination of a LEP visitor based on experience, and with the help of bilingual staff members where available.
2. Work conducted by FRES does not typically lend itself to in-person contacts. Most contact that occurs with the public is either conducted via telephone or through written correspondence.
3. Temporary interpreters may include bilingual FRES Department personnel including American Sign Language interpreters.

C. Provision of Language Assistance Services by phone

1. Besides our fire and EMS 9-1-1, FRES – Office of Emergency Management (OEM) maintains a Call Center (631-852-4900) which is activated in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.
2. Call Takers will be instructed to make note of any LEP language assistance needs and with the help of bilingual staff members where available, determine the caller's needs and requests.
3. On a case-by-case basis, OEM uses multilingual volunteers who are assessed in their language competency by the LEC.
4. If the caller doesn't appear to understand information provided or appears unable to communicate their needs clearly enough for Call Takers to provide service, the Call Center will contact the selected vendor Language Lines for interpretation assistance. This protocol is available for the LEC and Call Center Personnel.

D. Provision of Language Assistance Services for Correspondence Received

1. Written correspondence received in languages other than English will be submitted to the Language Access Coordinator who will arrange for translation. The correspondence will be answered in a timely manner in the original language of the writer.

E. Maintaining a List of Oral Interpreting Resources

We use, or have available for oral interpreting the following resources:

1. Bilingual staff members who may work directly with LEP individuals (current as of Nov. 2017):

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- i. Spanish (3)
  - ii. Hindi (1)
  - iii. Malayalam (1)
2. Bilingual staff members who provide oral interpreting when necessary:
  - i. Spanish (3)
  - ii. Hindi (1)
  - iii. Malayalam (1)
3. The department's Language Access Coordinator maintains the list of oral interpreting resources that are available to staff. (See [attachment 2.](#))
  - i. Names and extension for all resources
  - ii. Languages in which each interpreter or service is qualified
  - iii. Procedure for accessing each interpreter or service

V. Translations of Written Documents:

**The process to determine and reassess at least every two years starting from the effective date of this plan, those vital documents (including website content) which must be translated is as follows:**

The Public Safety Communications Group will convene annually to determine new or existing vital documents in need of translation. Once a county vendor is selected, it will be sent for translation in identified languages.

Forms and accompanying content identified as of use to Suffolk Residents:

- [Emergency Preparedness Registry Form](#)
- [Code RED Sign-Up Form](#)
- [Shelter Locator & Surge Maps](#)
- [Volunteer for Fire Service](#)
- [SERVES Scholarship Guidelines](#)
- [Volunteer for CERT](#)
- [Fire Extinguishing System License Application](#)
- [Application for Tent Use](#)

The following documents have been translated by the department into Spanish:

- Árboles de Navidad (Christmas Tree)
- Armas químicas y biológicas (HazMat)
- Centros de recuperación de desastres se cerraran (Disaster Recovery Centers)
- En el circuito de la seguridad (Electrical Fires)
- Es un incendio (Fire information)
- Exponiendo a un asesino invisible (Carbon monoxide)
- Fiesta

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- Guía de preparación del ciudadanía (Be prepared)
- Huracanes esté preparado (Hurricane Preparation)
- Incendios (Fire)
- Las velas (Candle use)
- Plan de escape (Escape plan)
- Trabajando unto para asegurar la casa contra incendios (Fire safety)

FRES will ensure that proofing/editing for correctness and cultural sensitivity are a component of the translation services by any vendor under contract as part of the publication process. FRES will ensure that plain language is used in materials produced before translation to ensure information is accessible to a range of literacy levels. Suffolk County has a contract with Language Lines for oral interpreting services within the Fire Rescue/EMS 9-1-1.

The department's Language Access Coordinator maintains the list of written translation resources that are available to staff which includes:

- A. Names and contact information for all resources
- B. Names and location of staff members who are available to provide oral translations of written documents
- C. Languages in which each translation service is qualified.
- D. Procedure for accessing each translation service.

All agency personnel who will provide interpretation or translation services shall receive training regarding the ethics of interpretation and will have their language proficiency assessed in accordance with Civil Service standards.

## VI. Administration

### A. Monitoring

To ensure compliance with the Plan, the LAC will monitor its implementation as follows:

- Review FRES Plan
- Review LEP complaints

This review will be done one a periodic basis but not less than annually by the Department language access coordinator on the provision of language assistance services, the availability of translated materials, whether signage is properly posted, demographic data and any other relevant measure.

FRES will consult with community-based organizations and conduct an internal review in order to assess the efficacy of its program.

Monitoring will be conducted using the following methods:

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- Staff interviews asking them to explain policy and methods of reaching interpretive services and or translation.
- Data Analysis where available
- Spot checkers
- The review of complaints for systemic issues
- Random review of Language Lines usage by department personnel.

#### B. Complaints

We provide information to the public, including to LEP individuals in languages encountered in this service area, advising them of the right to file a complaint if they feel that they have been the subject of discrimination. The information we provide describes how and/or where to file a complaint. We do not retaliate or take other adverse action because an individual has filed a complaint alleging discrimination based on LEP status or needs.

We will communicate information on the right to file a complaint and the procedure to file a complaint in the following manner:

The standardized complaint forms will be available to the public upon request in all six languages on [www.suffolkcountyny.gov](http://www.suffolkcountyny.gov).

- All complaints will be routed to the Language Access Coordinator (LAC) and FRES Commissioner for action.

#### C. Training

- Staff Training is mandatory
- Staff trainings will be held at least once per year or more often, as needed.
- All staff will be included in these trainings.
- Topics to be covered in these staff trainings will include (but not be limited to)
  - Identifying person needing LAS
  - Procedures for assessing Language Lines service
  - Standards for cultural competence

#### D. Notification

The public will be notified of the availability of language access services through prominent signage in public areas, notification on the website and through 9-1-1. The notice will specify that there shall be no charge for these services. FRES will not permit anyone to inquire about one's immigration status based upon their request for interpretation or translation services.

#### E. Information submitted in other languages

Each plan shall specify how the department responds to information submitted in languages other than English and within what time period.

**EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 10 - 2012**

TO: All Department Heads  
FROM: Steven Bellone, County Executive  
Dated: November 9, 2012  
RE: **Countywide Language Access Policy**

**WHEREAS**, Suffolk County is a linguistically diverse county in which 20 percent of the County's population over 5 years old speaks a language other than English at home, and nearly 10 percent of the people in Suffolk County are English-language learners or they are limited-English proficient, insofar as English is not their primary language and have limited ability to read, speak, write or understand English, thereby presenting potential barriers to accessing important government programs or services;

**WHEREAS**, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits agencies that receive federal funds for programs or activities from discriminating against persons on the basis of race, color or national origin; and

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to Presidential Executive Order 13166 (August 11, 2000), federally-funded agencies must take reasonable steps to ensure that people who have limited English proficiency (LEP) have access to the recipient's programs and services; and

**WHEREAS**, the public safety, health, economic prosperity, and general welfare of all Suffolk County residents is furthered by increasing language access to County programs and services; and

**WHEREAS**, the County is committed to ensuring that language access services are implemented in a cost effective and efficient manner;

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Steven Bellone, the County Executive of Suffolk County, by virtue of the authority vested in me pursuant to the authority of the Suffolk County Charter and Suffolk County Administrative Code, do hereby order as follows:

**Definitions.**

For purposes of this Order:

"Direct public services" means services administered by an agency directly to program beneficiaries and/or participants. For agencies that provide services to the public that are not programmatic in nature, such as emergency services, the provisions of this order shall be implemented to the greatest degree practicable.

"Executive County agencies" mean the agencies, departments and divisions of Suffolk County government overseen by the Suffolk County Executive as their administrative head.

"Vital documents, including essential public documents" means those documents most commonly distributed to the public that contain or elicit important and necessary information regarding the provision of basic County services.

## **Language Access Requirements.**

1. Executive County agencies that provide direct public services shall, in all relevant programs and services, competently translate vital documents, including essential public documents such as forms and instructions provided to or completed by program beneficiaries or participants. The translation shall be in the six most common non-English languages spoken by individuals with limited-English proficiency in the County of Suffolk, based on United States census data, and relevant to services offered by each of such agencies. Competent translation shall mean a trans-language rendition of a written message in which the translator comprehends the source language and can write comprehensively in the target language to convey the meaning intended in the source language. Agencies shall not use online translation tools such as Google Translate, Yahoo!, Babel Fish, or comparable services. Translation shall be achieved on a rolling basis to be completed no later than 365 days from the signing of this Order.
2. Each such agency, in all relevant programs and services, shall provide competent interpretation services between the agency and an individual in his or her primary language with respect to the provision of services or benefits. Competent interpretation shall mean a trans-language rendition of a spoken message in which the interpreter comprehends the source language and can speak comprehensively in the target language to convey the meaning intended in the source language. The interpreter shall know relevant terminology and provide accurate interpretations by choosing equivalent expressions that convey the best matching and meaning to the source language and capture to the greatest possible extent, all nuances intended in the source message.
3. Each such agency shall publish a language access plan that will reflect how the agency will comply with this Order and all progress since it last submitted a language access plan. Such plan shall be issued within 90 days of the signing of this Order, and updated every two years thereafter.
4. Each language access plan shall set forth, at a minimum, the following:
  - a. When and by what means the agency will provide, or is already providing, language assistance services;
  - b. The titles of all available translated documents and the languages into which they have been translated;
  - c. The number of public contact positions in the agency and the number of fully bilingual employees in public contact positions, including the languages they speak;
  - d. A training plan for agency employees which includes, at minimum, annual training on the language access policies of the agency and how to provide language assistance services;

e. A plan for annual internal monitoring of the agency's compliance with this Order;

f. A plan of how the agency intends to notify the population of offered language assistant services; and

g. A language access coordinator at the agency, who shall be publicly identified.

5. The language access coordinator for each such agency shall monitor the agency's compliance with this Order by annually collecting data on the provision of language assistance services, the availability of translated materials, whether signage is properly posted, and any other relevant measures. The monitoring plan shall include feedback from the public, community groups, and other stakeholders.

6. Use of language services shall not be deemed by any county employee as a basis for inquiring into confidential information relating to immigration status or other personal or private attributes. No county employee shall inquire about or disclose confidential information, including, but not limited to, immigration status, unless such inquiry or disclosure is required by law.

7. The Deputy County Executive for Intergovernmental Affairs shall oversee, coordinate and provide guidance to agencies in implementing this Order and ensure that the provision of services by agencies meets acceptable standards of translation or interpretation.

Dated: *November 14, 2012*



Steven Bellone  
Suffolk County Executive

cc: Regina M. Calcaterra, Chief Deputy County Executive  
Fred Pollert, Deputy County Executive  
Jon Schneider, Deputy County Executive  
Hon. Joseph Sawicki, Jr., Comptroller  
Hon. Judith A. Pascale, County Clerk  
Hon. Thomas J Spota, District Attorney  
Hon. Vincent F. DeMarco, Sheriff  
Hon. Angie M. Carpenter, County Treasurer  
Hon. William J. Lindsay, Presiding Officer  
Hon. DuWayne Gregory, Legislator  
Hon. John M. Kennedy, Legislator