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Strengthening Language Access in County Services

Los Angeles County (County) is a place where people from all over the world are welcome to pursue their dreams, raise families and make a positive contribution to all our lives. With nearly 3.5 million of its residents – about 36 percent of its total population – having been born outside the United States, the County is home to the largest immigrant population in any region in the United States. This dynamic immigrant population is deeply integrated, both socially and economically, into just about every aspect of County life. They make 44 percent of the County’s workforce, run small businesses that generate 40 percent of the County’s self-employed income, and pay billions of dollars in federal taxes every year. Additionally, nearly 60 percent of children born in the County have at least one immigrant parent, and 44 percent of households are headed by an immigrant. More than half of the County’s population speaks a language other than English at home – more than 220 languages - adding to the region’s rich cultural diversity.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the vital responsibility the County has in supporting all its residents to overcome the pandemic’s devastating health,

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economic, and social impact. Yet, in a County with more than one-third of the population having been born outside the United States, language continues to be a barrier in accessing basic government services. Equitable language access is crucial for the County to effectively perform its safety-net functions and support immigrants and their families who have been historically marginalized and currently disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. According to the USC Equity Institute's 2021 "State of Immigrants in L.A. County" report, one-third of all immigrant-headed households are linguistically isolated, meaning no one over the age of 14 in the household speaks English "very well." This includes 33 percent of Asian Pacific Islander (API) households and 29 percent of Latino households. The experiences of Latino and API immigrants, the two largest immigrant groups in the County, are not unique. Almost one in five Black residents are immigrants or second-generation children, with the majority of countries of origin being in Africa and the Caribbean. Furthermore, there are over 200 indigenous language groups from Latin America, many of which do not have written languages.

There are many services that the County provides on a daily basis to residents, some of which are easily accessible to non-English speaking residents because of translated materials and onsite, multi-lingual County employees. However, gaps remain in our ability to truly reach all people who need County services the most. A 2020 Migration Policy Institute report found that there are 6 state and 39 local language access policies across 40 jurisdictions. These policies ensure that there are standardized plans government agencies can adopt and implement to improve language accessibility. The City of Los Angeles recently adopted Executive Order 32 outlining its language access plan. The County must do the same.

As the County works tirelessly to help our residents overcome the pandemic, it is more important than ever before that we have the language capacity to equitably serve our immigrant residents. This Board established the Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA) to support the wellbeing of immigrants and their families through the delivery of County services, including culturally and linguistically competent outreach and education, policy recommendations and implementation, and advocacy. The pandemic has underlined the importance of this work, as well as the urgent need to develop and implement a Countywide strategic plan to institutionalize equitable language access standards. This includes marshalling the strength of County departments that most often serve immigrants and their families, community-based organizations, and public input to assess the County's language accessibility and identify opportunities to strengthen the progress we have made.

WE-I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA) in the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs (DCBA), in consultation with County Counsel, the Department of Children and Family Services, the Alliance for Health Integration, the Department of Public Social Services, other impacted County departments, as well as strategic external partners and stakeholders, to develop and submit to this Board, within 180 days, a Countywide Language Access and Equity Plan (Report) that includes:
 - a. A comprehensive assessment of the County's current language capacity to equitably serve its immigrant and Indigenous residents;

- b. A set of recommendations and strategies for the County to elevate its language access capacity by leveraging the County's labor force, partnerships, and technology;
 - c. A review of the Federal, State, and local legal requirements governing language access;
 - d. A strategic plan and timeline to implement, regularly review, and update the recommendations in the Report;
 - e. The projected fiscal and other anticipated impacts on the County to implement the recommendations in the Report in a sustainable manner Countywide.
2. Authorize the Director of DCBA, or his designee, to enter into agreements with consultants, community-based organizations, and/or other agencies to assist OIA in developing the above Report.