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**Language Justice: Enhancing Consistent Language Access to the Department of Children and Family Services' Asian Pacific Program**

Asian American and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islander (AANHPI) residents make up 16% of Los Angeles County's (County) 11 million residents. One in six people identify as AANHPI. The AANHPI community spans a range of languages, ethnicities, and cultures. Over a third of the AANHPI population in the County speak another language other than English. There are more than 240,000 children of AANHPI descent, which accounts for one in seven children in the County.

The Asian Pacific Program (APP) is bilingual bicultural service section of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) established in 1987 to assist AANHPI families with culturally and linguistically appropriate child welfare services to prevent child abuse and to improve their quality of life. Today, it is staffed to serve some of the following languages: Cambodian (Khmer), Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

While the existing program provides critical language services to AANHPI families experiencing involvement in the DCFS system, more must be done to expand the list of languages and ensure that communities such as the South Asian and the Pacific Islander diasporas are not left out. Large language populations including Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali,

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Tongan, and Samoan need dedicated resources and staffing within the department. According to the latest Census data, there are more than 50,000 people in Los Angeles County who speak these languages at home, many of whom are monolingual speakers.

In 2024, the County Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted a policy to mandate departments to develop language access plans, including DCFS. In response, DCFS issued its Language Access Plan (LAP) in July 2025<sup>1</sup>. The plan includes a variety of steps implemented by DCFS to ensure language accessibility. For example, “DCFS identifies priority languages by extracting data entered by Children’s Social Workers (CSW) into CW/CMS for each child’s case. This process ensures that the languages reported are directly linked to the children and families we serve and reflect the linguistic needs of our client populations. The primary languages are determined by assessing active cases and identifying the most frequently reported language other than English (LOTE) spoken by children and their families.”

Despite the plan and a dedicated unit within DCFS to communities with diverse language needs, advocates have raised concerns with the department regarding cases involving families and children who need language services but did not receive them, resulting in adverse consequences that should have been avoided. Notwithstanding previous motions emphasizing the need for and to expand accessibility of language access and services, master agreements, and shared resources from other County departments, or even on-demand interpreters, there is a gap that needs to be addressed and resolved.

Additionally, the provision of language services does not end with having materials

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<sup>1</sup> <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/209127.pdf>

available or on-hand for the 13 threshold languages in California<sup>2</sup> and Los Angeles County<sup>3</sup>, but to also have a plan to address language needs to accommodate those who engage with the County systems that are not represented in the list of threshold and concentration languages. The County prides itself in its diversity in communities and languages and has worked to expand language access resources to its constituents, in-language translation through software for Board meetings, and under the Board's direction for more engagement with ethnic media with a focus on inclusion in all forms.

Advocates cited an alarming example of a client who experienced physical, emotional, and financial abuse during her marriage. During one incident, law enforcement was called. The police arrived to get a statement from both parties. DCFS was then dispatched due to a child being in the home. The client's English was very limited, yet no interpreter was provided. Due to her testimony not being properly taken or understood and no culturally informed assessment made, the investigation wrongly labeled her the "perpetrator" and removed the child due to the client's alleged failure to protect. She lost custodial rights to her child, and the court was taking steps to grant the visitation rights for the father, despite his potential danger to the child and the system players' reliance on incomplete and false statements and information. Through the intervention of South Asian Network (SAN), a nonprofit organization based in the Fourth Supervisorial District, which provided a dedicated caseworker who spoke Bengali, advocated for the client and child leading to their reunification.

This is one of many examples that child welfare advocates have raised to highlight

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<https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/formsandpubs/Documents/MMCDAPLsandPolicyLetters/APL%202025/Threshold-and-Concentration-Languages-for-All-Counties.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/dhs/1078266\\_AttachmentA-LosAngelesCountyThresholdLanguages.pdf](https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/dhs/1078266_AttachmentA-LosAngelesCountyThresholdLanguages.pdf)

the gaps in language services within the system with dire consequences.

The reality is that an aspect of our constituents' engagement with County departments can be negative and stressful, for example entanglements with law enforcement, child welfare, juvenile justice, and the like, and LOTE individuals, navigating a complex system with a language barrier creates even more anxiety. These individuals are less likely to have informed consent documented, significantly reducing their understanding of procedures and processes, but also their autonomy in decision making. It increases the likelihood of individuals receiving inaccurate or insufficient information to make decisions, confidentiality breaches, and increased service errors and inefficiencies. Overall, miscommunication wastes time and resources and has the potential to cause irreversible harm.

Due to the critical and sensitive nature of child welfare services, more must be done to expand language accessibility in Los Angeles County.

**† WE, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services, in collaboration with the Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Office of Child, Youth, and Family Wellbeing, to report back, to the Board, in writing, in 90 days on the following:
  - a. The current languages and language services provided by the Asian Pacific Program section, including data-driven justifications of the selected languages currently being provided, if languages are outside of the threshold criteria;
  - b. Operating hours and policy and protocol considerations made for after-hour calls;
  - c. DCFS Hotline policy and protocol considerations to identify Language Other Than English (LOTE) callers and clients to provide consistent access to

language support, resources, and services; and

- d. An accounting of staff dedicated to the APP section, including any outside contractors or consultants; and inventory of bilingual and multilingual staff within the department, including their spoken and written capacities, as legally allowed.
2. All existing departmental protocols and policies for language service provisions, including but not limited to:
    - a. Status and current roles and duties of any and all individuals who are responsible for coordinating and/or overseeing the provision of meaningful language services, e.g., language access liaison or other staff delegated to perform these tasks; screening, evaluation protocols;
    - b. Procedures and process for when DCFS receives language service requests that the APP section cannot fulfill;
    - c. Current screening and evaluation protocols for translators and interpreters to provide services to DCFS; and
    - d. Current training provided on the DCFS Language Access Plan to APP section staff and all DCFS staff who are client-facing.
  3. Assessment and recommendations on how multilingual communications are meaningfully provided in languages that are emerging, have been historically isolated, are of lesser diffusion, and/or do not have a commonly used written format.
  4. Assessment and recommendations on how multilingual communications are meaningfully provided during urgent and emergency response situations.
  5. The feasibility, including the amount of funding needed, of expanding the number of languages served by the APP section. The feasibility report should use the following

data points in determining additional languages needed:

- a. The most recent census data from the United States Census Bureau, or recent data from any other relevant databases, including but not limited to, any of the following:
    - i. English Learner Data, available on the DataQuest reporting system, or any other relevant data provided by the California Department of Education;
    - ii. Any relevant data provided by the State Department of Finance;
    - iii. Community-level input from various mechanisms, including evidence-based data provided by community-based organizations or advocates<sup>4</sup>, focus groups, roundtables, and advisory bodies, especially during times of emergencies; and
  - b. Any relevant factors other than those described in this section, including levels of linguistic isolation<sup>5</sup> and percentages of limited English proficiency within each language group.
6. A progress report on the Department's implementation of its Language Access Plan, to include status on trainings, briefings, and updates to policies and procedures.
  7. Assessment and recommendations on safeguards that will be developed and implemented around the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine translation, utilizing the State of California Guidelines for Evaluating Impacts of Generative AI on Vulnerable and Marginalized Communities (GenAI Equity Guidelines) (December 2024).

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<sup>4</sup> AAPI Equity Alliance, South Asian Network, Center for Asian Americans United for Self Empowerment, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Center for the Pacific Asian Family, Korean American Family Services

<sup>5</sup> Households where no one over the age of 14 speaks English well or at all.

- a. Safeguards must include mechanisms for accountability, qualified human review, monitoring and oversight, ensuring no adverse impact on communities with protected characteristics, i.e., national origin and ethnic group identification<sup>6</sup>, and transparency and notice to linguistically marginalized communities.

**↓ WE, FURTHER MOVE**, that the Board of Supervisors

1. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services to report back, in writing, within 90 days on the following, with an emphasis on individuals who are Language Other than English (LOTE) speakers:
  - a. The current departmental policy on Failure to Protect and ensuring cultural competency and sensitivity are incorporated in the implementation of it;
  - b. The existing resources provided to domestic violence survivors with open DCFS cases, including in-language system navigation; and
  - c. The training that all client-facing DCFS staff, including investigators and social workers, with specific emphasis on the APP section, receive on domestic violence, along with evaluations and recommendations on the need to expand the trainings to be more culturally competent.

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<sup>6</sup> California Government Code 11135