

# PUBLIC COMMENT

Submitted to: The Office of Equity Task Force

Submitted by: Joana Ramos, Chair, Healthcare Committee, WA State Coalition for Language Access

Date: November 22, 2019

Dear members of the Office of Equity Task Force,

I am writing to you now to share brief comments for your discussions on November 25.

1) Regarding the draft workplan for the Office of Equity, it is positive to see the multiple mentions of need to ensure meaningful language access into all functions of state government. To that end, it will be essential to create a position of Language Access Manager at the level of the other program manager positions, shown on the draft Organizational Structure chart on page 33. Perhaps in the future this function might fit as a responsibility of the Innovations Manager, but this would be possible only after robust language access services supported by high-level technical assistance become the norm in state government. It should be recognized that language access and language assistance services are a distinct speciality area, requiring a high degree of expertise and experience to be able to assure that appropriate services are provided at all points of service, and in conjunction with all equity measures and practices being put in place.

2) Regarding consideration of revisions to HB 1783, language access should be specifically included in all mentions of objectives and strategies for eliminating disparities, and "national origin" should be added to descriptors of "inequities based on race, ethnicity, and gender", as the ban on national origin discrimination is the basis for the civil rights legislation governing language access, at the federal and state levels. In addition, in the face of current attacks and threats at the federal level regarding public services and rights of immigrants and refugees, Washington must take the lead to expand its own explicit protections and efforts to ensure equity of access for all residents. It would be helpful to add demographic data about our state population, including:

- Of our state's 7.5 million people, 1 in 7 are immigrants and refugees who speak over 200 different languages.
- Almost 19% of residents speak a language other than English at home; of whom at least 8%—over 500,000 people—say their ability to speak English is limited.
- Eighty-five percent of our public-school districts enroll students who are English language learners, and many parents need language assistance to communicate effectively with teachers and school personnel.

Please don't hesitate to contact WASCLA if you have any questions or would like more information.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments, and for your consideration of these remarks.

Sincerely,

Joana Ramos  
Immediate Past President, WASCLA Board of Directors  
Chair, Healthcare Committee  
Washington State Coalition for Language Access



*WASCLA is an education and advocacy organization whose mission is to eliminate language barriers that prevent Washington residents from accessing essential services, through collaborative efforts. We welcome you to join in our efforts and to support this important work. WASCLA is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, EIN 90-0517290, which relies on contributions from our supporters. Donations to WASCLA are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.*