From:	Joana Ramos
To:	DOH WSBOH Health Disparities Council
Cc:	WASCLA
Subject:	Comments for Dec. 16, 2019 Meeting of the Office of Equity Taskforce
Date:	Friday, December 13, 2019 8:10:09 AM

Dear members of the Office of Equity Task Force,

I am writing to you now to share brief comments for your meeting on December 16.

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 achieve that goal, it will be essential to create a specific position of Language Access Manager at the level of the other program manager positions, shown on the draft Organizational Structure chart on page 33. This position is essential to ensure that robust language access services, supported by high-level technical assistance, become the norm across state government.
Understanding of language access and provision of meaningful language assistance services comprise a distinct speciality area. For successful implementation , language services must be coordinated by an individual with a high degree of professional expertise in the sector. To ensure that high quality and appropriate services are provided at all points of service in state government , language services must be directed by a well-qualified individual with relevant training and direct experience in the field. ,and who works together with a team to be charged with ensuring that all equity measures and practices of an Office of Equity are being put into place.

2) Regarding consideration of revisions to HB 1783, language access should be specifically mentioned in all sections referring to the objectives and strategies for eliminating disparities, and the term "national origin" should be added to the phrase "inequities based on race, ethnicity, and gender". The ban on national origin discrimination is the basis for the right to langauge access under civil rights legislation at the federal and state levels..
Also, in the current political climate, with attacks on, and threats to, access to public services and challenges to the civil and human rights of immigrants and refugees, Washington State must take a strong lead to expand its commitment to protections and efforts to ensure equity of access to services for all residents.
Therefore, it would be helpful to add demographic data about our state population as context for making the case for the establishment of an Office of Equity. Some important data points are:

- 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. It should be noted that this Census-derived estimate is considered to be an undercount,due to both under-representation of immigrants and refugees among

Census respondents, and because the Census only asks about ability to speak English, not the other components of language which include understanding, reading, and writing.

- 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 me 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

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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.