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New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner

Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan

June 2024



Language Access Implementation Plan	2
Signatures	3
1. OCME Mission.....	4
2. Agency Language Access Policy	5
3. Language Access Needs Assessment.....	6
4. Notice of the Right to Language Access Services	9
5. Provision of Language Access Services.....	9
A. Interpretation Services.....	9
B. Translation Services	10
C. Emergency Preparedness and Response	10
6. Resource Planning	11
A. Bilingual and Multilingual staffing	11
B. Language service vendor contracts	11
C. Partnerships with CBOs.....	11
7. Training	11
8. Continuous improvement planning	12
A. Data collection and monitoring.....	12
B. Language access complaints.....	12
9. Goals and actions planning	12
10. Glossary, footnotes, appendix	13

Language Access Implementation Plan

The Language Access Implementation Plan explains how the agency will provide services to people who have limited English proficiency (or LEP).

Agency name: New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner

Language Access Coordinator name: Alison L. Nixon

Language Access Coordinator title: Counsel

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This Plan includes information about:

1	Agency mission and services	
2	Agency language access policy	
3	Language access needs assessment	How the agency assesses the language access needs of the people it serves
4	Notice of the right to language access services	How the agency notifies the public about their right to language access services
5	Provision of language services	What language services the agency provides
6	Resource planning	How the agency ensures that it has the internal and external resources to provide language services
7	Training	How the agency trains the staff to provide language services
8	Continuous improvement planning	How the agency ensures ongoing improvement of language access
9	Goals and actions planning	How the agency will put the plan into action

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OCME Mission

The Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) investigates cases of persons who die within the City of New York from criminal violence; by accident or by suicide; suddenly, when in apparent health; when unattended by a physician; in a correctional facility; or in any suspicious or unusual manner. The Office also reviews applications made pursuant to law for a permit to cremate the body of a person.

OCME provides the following direct public services in the five boroughs through interaction between OCME staff members and members of the public:

- Investigation of reportable deaths
- Identification of decedents, in which family members may come to any one of OCME's five Family Service Centers to view a photograph of their loved one to make the identification
- Discussion of relevant cases between family members and the assigned Medical Examiner, most commonly by telephone but by in-person appointment if requested
- Records requests, such as autopsy reports
- Various family services, including the World Trade Center Hotline and Missing Persons Day

Local Law 30

In July of 2017, Local Law 30 went into effect, expanding language access at City agencies. Local Law 30 amended the New York City Charter and Administrative Code to require all covered City agencies to provide language access services in ten designated citywide languages.¹ Covered City agencies must: i) provide language access services to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP); ii) develop and implement a language access implementation plan; iii) provide telephonic interpretation in at least 100 languages; and iv) update its LAIP at least every three years, and publish the LAIP on the agency website.

¹ OCME provides language access services in the following languages: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Polish, Korean, French, Haitian-Creole, Japanese, Arabic, Italian, Urdu and Bengali.

Local Law 13

In December of 2022, the New York City Council passed Local Law 13, which requires City agencies to plan how they will manage any sudden increase in language access needs from speakers of a language other than a designated citywide language, such as an emergency disproportionately impacted speakers of a particular language. The mandate for effective management of emergency communications includes the need to list the types of materials that such agencies may disseminate in an emergency.

Local Law 15

In January 2023, Local Law 15, which had been passed by the City Council, amended the Administrative Code to require city agencies to translate important documents that relate to enforcement of the laws and rules such agencies enforce, to utilize plain language principles for documents most commonly distributed to the public if such materials contain information about the provision of basic city services and enforcement of laws and rules, and to train frontline employees, including inspectors and other enforcement staff.

The OCME investigates cases of persons who die under circumstances enumerated within the City of New York (see Section 1. Agency Mission and Language Access Policy Background). It does not have the statutory authority to enforce typical enforcement activities, nor does it have enforcement personnel. Thus, Local Law 15 is inapplicable to the OCME.

2. Agency Language Access Policy

OCME created the first Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan in 2008 to ensure compliance with Executive Order 120 and continues to comply with Local Law 30. The policy of OCME continues to be that limited English proficiency shall not be a barrier to receiving effective services. This Plan affirms the OCME's commitment to providing meaningful access for all citizens of New York and other locations, including individuals with limited English proficiency who need the agency's services.

Ensuring timely access to services through language assistance measures is essential for the OCME's staff members to interact effectively with families and reach the most appropriate outcomes. This Plan outlines how the OCME seeks to ensure that individuals in need of the OCME's services receive them, and to avoid the possibility that a person who requires access to services is denied such services based on the language he or she speaks. This Plan is monitored by

the agency's Language Access Coordinator, Alison L. Nixon, who also serves as Counsel in the Office of the General Counsel at OCME.

3. Language Access Needs Assessment

OCME uses the Four-Factor Analysis as a guide to evaluate the limited English (LEP) populations served by the agency. This approach provides a balanced assessment of the OCME's current language assistance needs while allowing flexibility to adjust language assistance policies in response to monitoring and measurement. The OCME reviewed monthly invoices from Language Line to determine which languages were most frequently requested by LEP individuals. Language Line provides interpretation services in more than 170 languages available 24 hours every day including weekends and holidays. This resource is available to OCME staff members whose work involves interactions with the families and other members of the public served by the agency. For document translation services, the OCME utilizes Geneva Worldwide. Geneva Worldwide supports document translation in 180 languages.

The most frequently requested languages at the OCME are Spanish, Chinese², Russian, Polish, Korean, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Arabic, and Italian. Commonly distributed forms, such as the Identification Form, Autopsy Objection Form, etc., along with the "Information for Family and Friends" brochure, were translated into those ten languages, in addition to Urdu and Bengali.

Factor 1: Demographic Analysis

The OCME's eligible service population is defined as New York City, segmented by county to correspond with the agency's services for families in each of the five boroughs. According to data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017-2021 American Community Survey, the total population of New York City is 8,804,190, and of that population, 22.2% (1,816,630) persons are Limited English Proficient (LEP). This represents a decrease of -1.2% in the LEP population since the previous American Community Survey.

Data provided by the New York City Department of City Planning, based on the 2017-2021 American Community Survey, shows that the top six languages spoken by the 1.8 million LEP persons in New York City are Spanish (47.7%), Chinese (18.6%), Russian (6.4%), Bengali (3.6%), Yiddish (2.2%), and Haitian-Creole (2.0%).

In Manhattan (New York County), 13.9% of the total population of 1.59 million is LEP. Among the LEP population in Manhattan, the most frequent languages spoken are Spanish (15.7%) and Chinese (14.1%).

² Includes Chinese, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

In Brooklyn (Kings County), 40% of the total population of 2.52 million is LEP. Among the LEP population in Brooklyn, the most frequent languages spoken are Spanish (18.9%), Chinese (36.4%), Russian (74.6%).

In Queens (Queens County), 28.3% of the total population of 2.25 million is LEP. Among the LEP population in Queens, the most frequent languages spoken are Spanish (30.3%) and Chinese (17.2%).

In the Bronx (Bronx County), 25.9% of the total population of 1.37 million is LEP. Among the LEP population in the Bronx, the most frequent language spoken is Spanish (33.2%).

In Staten Island (Richmond County), 2.6% of the total population of 465,650 is LEP. Among the LEP population in Staten Island, the most frequent languages spoken are Spanish (1.8%), Chinese (4.8%) and Russian (6.7%).

Factor 2: LEP Data Tailored Specifically to OCME

The OCME Instituted Language Line in 2007 to provide telephonic interpretation and translation services in more than 170 languages. Language Line usage is tracked by monitoring monthly invoices to measure the frequency of languages encountered by OCME, to adjust Language Access services as necessary, and to inform future planning.

From the second quarter of 2021 through the end of 2023, OCME personnel made 9,978 calls to Language Line to provide families served by the OCME with Language Access assistance. In a close reflection of the Citywide demographic analysis, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian represented most of the languages encountered, at 93%. Spanish accounted for 79.02% of calls, Chinese accounted for 9.22% of calls, Russian accounted for 4.86% of calls, Polish accounted for 1.41% of calls, and Korean accounted for 0.81% of calls. Rounding out the ten most-frequently requested languages by LEP callers to OCME are French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Arabic and Italian.

Languages that appear among the twenty most requested by LEP callers from 2021-2023 include Greek, Punjabi, Portuguese, Romanian, Bengali, Turkish, Hungarian, Georgian, and Albanian.

A total of 52 languages were encountered from 2021 through the first quarter of 2023. In addition to Spanish and Chinese, top languages included Polish, Korean, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Arabic and Italian.

Use of Language Line decreased by 2.7% between 2022 and 2023, declining from 4,049 calls to 3,943 calls.

Factor 3: Nature and importance of the Services Requiring Language Assistance Measures

The services requiring language assistance are essential to the mission of the OCME. These services include the Communications Unit's intake of calls from families or other members of the public inquiring about deaths investigated by the OCME. interactions between the medico-legal investigations and individuals including next of kin at the scene of a death; the identification process, which includes arranging for final disposition of a decedent; discussion of death investigations between family members and the assigned medical examiners; and requests for important records, such as autopsy reports.

Denial or delay in these essential services can pose negative consequences for family members, as well as the criminal justice and public health systems served by OCME.

Factor 4: Resources Designated for Language Access Services

Language Line

Language Line provides interpretation and translation services in more than 170 languages available 24 hours every day including weekends and holidays. The resource is available to the OCME staff members whose work involves interactions with the families and other members of the public served by the agency.

Staff Language Resources

The OCME has solicited its employees to build awareness of the availability of bilingual or multilingual staff members who can offer oral interpretations in each of the agency's service areas. Notably, the Emergency Management/Special Operations and Forensic Biology departments maintain a list of its staff members who offer alternate oral interpretation coverage of multiple languages and are deployed to assist the Family Assistance Center by speaking with families during disaster operations.

4. Notice of the Right to Language Access Services

Outreach and Public Awareness of Language Access Services

OCME's mission and the nature of services provided do not warrant conducting public awareness outreach. For those citizens of New York and other locations who need to avail themselves of OCME's services, the agency's policy is to ensure that limited English proficiency is not a barrier to receiving meaningful and effective services. To inform those members of the public about its Language Access policy and services, OCME posts signage in family waiting areas to advise clients of Language Access services such as the availability of free interpretation and translation. In addition, OCME makes its two brochures, "General Information" and "Information for Family and Friends", available on its website in the languages most frequently encountered by the agency. The Language Access Policy and Implementation Plan is posted on the website, and the website also includes a "Translate This Page" button to make online material available in over 131 languages.

5. Provision of Language Access Services

Interpretation Services

Interpretation services are available over the phone or in person at OCME service centers in each of the five boroughs. Telephone interpretation service is available in more than 170 languages through OCME's participation in the citywide contract with Language Line. In-person interpretation during times of emergency operations is currently available in 22 languages spoken by 80 members of OCME's bilingual staff. Those 22 languages include Gujarati, Hindi, Spanish, Japanese, Italian, French, German, Russian, Haitian Creole, Cantonese, Ukrainian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Korean, Danish, Serb-Croatian, Filipino, Greek, Tagalog, Hebrew, Arabic and Galician. Both telephone and in person interpretation services are available in Spanish, Chinese, and Russian, the primary languages of the vast majority of LEP persons served by OCME. These in-house volunteer translators also aid in translating pieces of evidence and speaking with family members on a day-to-day basis.

LEP individuals self-identify the language in which they need OCME assistance by referring to the Language ID Placard as an aid. The placard consists of an 8x11 laminated sheet of paper that allows family members to point to the language in which they require services. In addition, the agency's medico-legal investigators each have this placard and they are also now available at OCME Family Services/Identification offices.

Translation Services

OCME identifies the most distributed forms as official documents that require signature, and brochures that explain key practices and policies of the agency. These vital forms were previously translated into the languages most frequently encountered by OCME. The most requested languages at OCME are Spanish, Chinese³, Russian, Polish, Korean, French, Haitian Creole, Japanese, Arabic, Italian, Urdu and Bengali. The OCME has also translated its most distributed documents into Bengali and Urdu to ensure all vital documents have been translated into the top twelve designated citywide languages.

Official documents that have been translated include the Identification Form, Organ Retention Form, and Autopsy Objection Form signed by families, and the Pending Death Certificate⁴ signed by medical examiners. Brochures that have been translated include "General Information" and "Information for Family and Friends." Translations are provided through Language Line and the Geneva Worldwide vendor, which certifies its work for accuracy and authenticity. All translations are made using the "Easy-to-Read NYC: Guidelines for Clear and Effective Communication" developed by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

OCME began the process of updating vital forms as necessary in the second half of 2015. Updated forms were translated into Spanish and Chinese, the languages most frequently encountered by OCME, and other languages, if necessary, as measured by tracking and monitoring. The materials were reviewed to ensure that they are written in plain language.

OCME has also provided language assistance through its website since February 2009. Translations of the website are available in more than 30 languages through the "Translate This Page" link at the top of each web page.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

If an emergency occurs resulting in a mass fatality, OCME is prepared to assist LEP individuals seeking information through utilization of volunteer employee translators and Language Line.

OCME has designated an Emergency Management Liaison among its staff. The Liaison coordinates with the entire agency and serves as a resource for other city agencies to interface with OCME as part of the critical effort to ensure that municipal emergency operations run smoothly and efficiently.

Included among the OCME documents that may be distributed to the public during an emergency are the Identification Form, Autopsy Objection Form, Records Request Form, Information for Family and Friends brochure, and more.

³ Includes Chinese, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

⁴ Final death certificates, which are issued by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, are published in English only.

6. Resource Planning

A. Bilingual and Multilingual staffing

The OCME created and maintains a roster to centralize awareness of the availability of bilingual or multilingual staff members who can offer oral interpretations in each of the service areas: interpretation services, translation services and emergency preparedness and response. The roster currently has 80 staff members representing 22 languages.

B. Language service vendor contracts

OCME tracks Language Line usage by monitoring the charges detailed on the service's monthly invoices to OCME. This data provides insight into which languages are being requested at each of the five service centers and enables OCME to identify additional languages into which forms should be translated, and areas within the agency where additional training may be necessary. Records will be maintained by the OCME's Language Services Coordinator and its Department of Finance and Procurement. Reporting on language services contracting and expenditures will continue to be included in the OCME Language Access Annual Report.

C. Partnerships with CBOs

Currently, the OCME does not have partnerships with any CBOs. Please see Section 9 for a discussion of goal-planning relevant to CBOs.

7. Training

All staff members whose work involves regular contact with the public receive Language Access training. Frontline employees who interact with LEP persons include Medical Examiners, Medico-Legal Investigators, Security, and staff members of the Identifications and Communications Units. Training is provided at the start of employment and thereafter as needed.

Training for frontline employees encompasses the content of OCME's Language Access Policy, a review of the "Guidelines and Procedures for Using Language Line," viewing of the Language Line training video (available on the Language Line website), methods for implementing interpretation and translation services (e.g. identifying a customer's primary language, reporting requests for language services, the use of telephonic interpreters, and placing translation requests), as well as notes on cultural competency.

"Interpretation Services Available" wall posters, language ID cards, 311 complaint posters, and Language Line quick reference guides are distributed. These materials are also made available to employees for downloading at any time on OCME's Intranet.

8. Continuous improvement planning

A. Data collection and monitoring

The unique nature of the OCME's mission to serve public health and the criminal justice system through forensic science circumscribes its ability to collect and maintain accurate and reliable data on relevant demographic data and language services. New Yorkers who interact with the OCME rarely do so not at their own instigation, but rather as the result of personal loss of their loved ones. They experience grief and have many questions and concerns that the OCME must address with sensitivity. Due to the complexity of the OCME's role in the lives of the city's residents, it is not feasible to survey grieving families regarding their language services experiences and needs as LEPs.

To access accurate and reliable data on relevant demographic data and language services, the OCME will avail itself of population data provided by DCP. Further, the OCME will collect and analyze data extracted from the invoices of its interpretation vendor and translation vendor to determine and assess trends. This data analysis will be deployed as a proxy for the identification and tracking of emergent languages outside of the designated city languages.

B. Language access complaints

OCME is committed to ensuring that LEP individuals have access to the same resources as English proficient individuals. OCME seeks to ensure that any complaints made about its language access services are handled in a proactive and efficient manner. Members of the public can submit complaints or requests for language access services from OCME by calling or emailing 311. OCME receives email notification of any filed 311 complaints or requests from the Mayor's Office. This 311-email inbox is monitored by OCME's Director of Public Affairs. If a complaint or request for language access services was filed through 311, the Director of Public Affairs would notify OCME's Language Access Coordinator. The complaint or request would then be handled accordingly.

Between 2019-2023, OCME received zero complaints for language access services.

9. Goals and actions planning

Goals

The OCME has three prospective goals in relation to Language Access. The OCME will research and review potential Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) for the purpose of building collaborative relationships that will benefit community members who are also LEPs. The OCME will prepare a list of potential partners by the June 2025, and execute a Memorandum of Understanding with one CBO.

The OCME also plans to publish an online survey of all agency employees to solicit feedback on the agency utilization of language interpretation services, the emergence of breakthrough languages (outside of the most frequently spoken), the identification of additional public OCME documents for translation, and the language access services “wish list.”

The OCME will initiate a review of the agency website from the usability of its language access services perspective. Key questions will include how OCME can measure and increase the utilization of the translation resources on the website, prioritizing the translation of most frequently used agency forms that reside on the website, including the Records Request Form (Next of Kin). The OCME will also compare the languages utilized by website visitors and the most frequently requested languages of our interpretation services.

Actions Planning

The OCME survey regarding Language Access services will be conducted in Q3 of FY2024, and results will be tabulated and used to inform the selection of additional agency documents for translation, as well as the translation of current and additional documents in languages beyond the designated city languages based upon results for a survey question eliciting suggestions for OCME documents to be translated.

The OCME will initiate an analysis of the language access components on the agency website. Utilization rates of the translation resource will be measured; results will be leveraged to better address the language services needs of New York City’s LEP population. These results will also inform the number and type of agency documents that are translated to meet language services mandates found in Local Laws 30, 13 and 15 respectively.

10. Glossary, footnotes, appendix

This section not applicable.