



OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER GLENN D. MAGPANTAY

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

1331 Pennsylvania Ave. NW • Suite 1150 • Washington, DC 20425 • www.usccr.gov

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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release: May 18, 2026

Contact: Stephanie Wong, swong@usccr.gov

USCCR Releases Unprecedented Report and Rare Bipartisan Recommendations to the President and Congress on Language Access

Washington, D.C. – Today, the United States Commission on Civil Rights unveiled its [report](#) on “*Language Access for Americans with Limited English Proficiency*,” and delivered its unanimous bipartisan findings and recommendations to the President and Congress.

Commissioner Glenn D. Magpantay, who led the investigation, said: “Millions of Americans rely on essential government services and federally funded programs, yet too many face unnecessary barriers simply because English is not their first language. This report and our unanimous bipartisan recommendations will ensure equal access for all Americans.”

“There are more than 27 million individuals in the U.S. with limited English proficiency, including 32 percent of Asian Americans and 12 percent of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Language access is vital to our communities, yet we’re seeing federal efforts to roll back multilingual resources that help people enroll in healthcare and access critical safety net programs,” **said Rep. Grace Meng, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.** “This report underscores the importance of multilingual services to ensure the health and wellbeing of AANHPI communities, and I am proud to lead the Language Access for All Act to codify federal language access into law and ensure no one falls through the cracks.”

Commissioner J. Christian Adams, who worked with Commissioner Magpantay on the report, noted that language assistance is already mandated under federal law in other contexts. He stated: “Congress passed Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act that requires election materials that allow language minorities to understand them in certain areas of the United States.”

Background

Today, approximately 27 million people in the U.S., about 8% of the population, are limited English proficient (LEP). Among them:

- Latino, Spanish-speaking adults make up two-thirds of the LEP population, while LEP Asian American, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs) account for over one-fifth;
- Within these broader groups, certain communities show higher rates of LEP, with about 77% of Puerto Ricans and 62% of Cuban Americans identifying as LEP; and
- Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Tagalog rank among the top 5 languages spoken by LEP Americans, with Arabic and Russian ranking amongst the top languages spoken across LEP Americans.

Various federal laws and regulations, Supreme Court decisions, and Presidential Executive Orders (EO) collectively encourage, permit, and in many cases, mandate language assistance so that Americans with limited English proficiency can meaningfully access government services and federally funded programs. Six states and over 35 counties and municipalities have enacted their own language assistance requirements.

Over the course of this investigation, the Commission uncovered troubling patterns:

- Mistranslations of life-saving health information;
- Disparate accuracy rates by Machine Translation tools for different languages;
- Legally mandated oral interpreters not provided upon request; and
- Explicit instances of required language access services overlooked or altogether neglected.

The Investigation

No federal agency nor any Congressional Committee has ever systematically investigated language access or compliance with Executive Order 13166, which was meant to ensure that Americans with limited English proficiency could meaningfully access government services and federally funded programs. EO 13166 was signed and upheld across five administrations: Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump (1st term), and Biden.

This report is the culmination of a year-long investigation into barriers faced by LEP Americans in accessing federally operated and federally funded services, including social safety net programs such as SNAP food assistance and hospital and healthcare services.

The Commission held a public [hearing](#) on March 21, 2025, where Commissioners heard from subject matter experts such as government officials, academics, policy experts, advocates, and impacted persons. The Commission also accepted written materials from the public for consideration in the final report.

Among those who testified was **Chi-Ser Tran, Supervising Attorney at Community Legal Services (CLS) in Philadelphia, who shared the following:** "This report demonstrates that language access is essential to a functioning and fair society, helping to alleviate poverty, drive wages and economic stability, improve health outcomes, and ensure that legal rights are protected. It's crucial that the fight against poverty and efforts to promote justice include language access, and CLS is heartened that there is bipartisan support for this."

English as the Official Language

During this investigation, President Trump issued Executive Order 14224 on March 1, 2025, which designated English as the official language of the United States.

Commissioner Magpantay clarified: "The Order is mostly symbolic. While it mandates that all federal governmental materials be available in English, which is already the case, nothing in the Order requires the elimination of translated materials, translated webpages, or interpreter telephone services."

The Order explicitly permits federal agencies to maintain existing policies, including language access plans, and to provide documents and services in languages other than English alongside English versions. It requires that translations be accurate, efficient, and cost effective.

However, EO 14224 also repealed Executive Order 13166, the 26-year-old order that had enjoyed bipartisan support across five administrations.

Commissioner Magpantay noted: “The effect today is that federal agencies are no longer mandated to provide language access as required under EO 13166, though they may still do so. Agency heads now have discretion in determining how and when to offer translated materials and interpretation services in fulfillment of their missions. I urge President Trump to rescind EO 14224 and immediately reinstate EO 13166 to ensure that Americans with limited English proficiency can meaningfully access federally operated and federally funded programs.”

Bipartisan Recommendations

The report and recommendations were approved by a rare unanimous bipartisan vote. Key recommendations include:

I. Best Practices

- Employ a two-step process where translations are reviewed by stakeholders or proofread by a different translator to ensure accuracy and appropriateness (i.e., neither too colloquial, nor overly formal).
- Ensure that machine translations and artificial intelligence have quality-assurance systems such as human reviewers, to ensure translations are accurate.
- Collaborate with community stakeholders for a community review process to ensure readability and understandability.
- Provide periodic staff training on federal, state, and municipal language access laws and regulations.

Dr. Bill Rivers, Principal at WP Rivers & Associates, said: “This report represents a monumental effort by the Commission to focus on a critical right — language access — which, while longstanding in Supreme Court case law and a patchwork of federal and state laws, gets overlooked too frequently or addressed in ways that are trivial and ineffective. The data make clear the real-world impact of language access on the lives, health, and rights of more than 26 million people in the U.S. The recommendations provide a roadmap for realizing this part of the promise of a fair and just society.”

II. To Departments and Agencies

- Consistent with the Attorney General’s Guidance, language assistance, when provided, should be “accurate,” “efficient,” and “cost effective.”
- Departments and agencies should fully comply with federal, state, and municipal laws that require language access.
- Departments and agencies should identify and provide language assistance to federally operated and federally funded public facing programs and services for limited English proficient persons.

III. To Congress

- Congress should codify E.O. 13166 into federal law to ensure meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency to federally operated and federally funded programs.
- Congressional legislation for language access should include the following factors in determining language assistance for specific language minority groups
 - The number or proportion of LEP persons in the eligible service population;
 - The frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the program;
 - The importance of benefit, service, information, or encounter to the LEP person (including the consequences of lack of language services or inadequate interpretation/translation); and,
 - The resources available to the recipient and the costs of providing various types of language services.

Commissioner Magpantay concluded: “The Language Access for All Act of 2026 (H.R. 7223) would effectuate these recommendations and I urge Congress to adopt the bill.”

Commissioner Magpantay plans to share this report and its recommendations with additional stakeholders and Member of Congress in the coming months.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights enforcement and recommending civil rights policy.