
AB 1084 (Nguyen) - Bilingual Oriented Social Equity Services (BOSES) Grant Program

Problem: Inadequate Language Access to Government Services

Currently, the quality and extent of language accessibility and cultural competency of government services in California are inadequate for limited English proficiency (LEP) community members. Consequently, millions of Californians are denied essential government services, utilization of healthcare, and safeguards from becoming victims of fraud. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2021 almost 44% of California households speak a language other than English, and nearly seven million Californians (17.5%) report speaking English “less than very well.” Statewide, most LEP households speak Spanish, followed by various languages from Asia and the Pacific Islands. To fill the gaps, community-based organizations (CBOs) take on the enormous task of providing in-language services such as legal aid, healthcare navigation, domestic violence case management, social service enrollment and more. CBOs are crucial to the accessibility of essential services but are in dire need of more resources to reinforce these community-based infrastructures.

Currently, the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act governs language access standards in California. State agencies are required to have bilingual staff and translated documents when the office services an area where more than 5% of the population speak a non-English language. For example, the Department of Motor Vehicles offices that service Koreatown, Los Angeles are required to have both translated documents and bilingual employees in Spanish and Korean. Despite the requirements by law, [an article by KQED](#) highlighted how poor language accessibility is at the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) with only one bilingual safety inspector for Cantonese and Vietnamese out of 214 inspectors, none in any other Asian and Pacific Islander language.

Background on Bilingual Pay

Bilingual pay is a pay supplement for bilingual employees who utilize a non-English language on a regular basis to execute their duties. For example, Los Angeles County under its Code of Ordinances “§ 6.10.140 Bilingual pay” offers full-time bilingual employees \$50 per pay period or \$0.57 per hour after meeting two requirements. First, an employee’s supervisor or their Human Resources Department assesses their fluency and cultural competency. Second, an employee’s department head and the chief administrative officer confirms that the employee utilizes bilingual skills on a regular basis to execute their duties. Bilingual pay rewards staff for having a valuable skill and shows the willingness to invest resources into creating greater language access.

Unfortunately, CBOs do not have the resources to competitively compensate their bilingual staff. In a survey conducted by AJSOCAL, as of Jan 3, 2023, 27 of the 34 responding organizations answered “no” to if they can give their staff bilingual pay.

Solution

AB 1084 (Nguyen) establishes the Bilingual Oriented Social Equity Services Grant Program and:

1. Authorizes the Department of Social Services to distribute this funding to community-based, nonprofit organizations who provide social services that ensure equity in access.
2. Establishes equitable division of funding into two sub-grants: 40% of the funding for the Multilingual Success grants and 60% for the Multilingual Access grants. The Multilingual Success grants will support the languages that meet the population thresholds under the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act. The Multilingual Access grants will support the languages that do not meet the population thresholds under the Bilingual Services Act.
3. Defines “direct service professionals” as employees who regularly communicate in a language or medium other than English as a part of their regular job duties and have been certified by their employing organization to be fluent.

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