

MEDFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY

LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN

The Medford Housing Authority (MHA) is committed to ensuring equal access to its programs, services and activities by all applicants and residents whose primary language is other than English. Under Title VI and Executive Order 13166, the Medford Housing Authority must take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to its programs and services by Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development issued Final Guidance on January 22, 2007 to recipients of HUD funding concerning compliance with Title VI prohibition against national origin discrimination affecting LEP persons. This guidance requires recipients of HUD funding to conduct a four-factor analysis to determine the extent of their obligations to provide LEP services.

The MHA conducted a four factor analysis and has prepared this Language Access Plan to be used by staff of all departments at the MHA. Staff are required to implement the actions of this plan to ensure compliance with respect to LEP persons. The MHA will update and review this plan by conducting a four factor analysis every three years and within the interim years review and update the plan as dictated by monitoring the needs of our LEP persons.

I. Goals of the Language Action Plan

- A. To ensure access to all LEP persons who may come in contact with the MHA's Programs/Services/Activities.
- B. To ensure that MHA staff of all departments are aware of available language assistance services and how to activate the process of providing the services to serve our LEP population.
- C. To ensure that all LEP persons who come into contact with the MHA Programs are made aware of the MHA's obligation to provide free interpretation services to facilitate their participation in our programs/activities/services.
- D. To provide for periodic review and update of this LAP in accordance with the needs of the MHA community.
- E. To provide written translations of vital documents to LEP persons in accordance with HUD 'safe harbor' guidelines.

II. LEP persons who need language assistance.

The "LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME – 2009-2011 American Community Survey, U.S. Census" estimates the population of Medford at 53,784 and:

- 1,555 of the population of Medford speaks “Spanish or Spanish Creole” – with 1,286 of that population in the age range of an Head of Household (HOH);
- 9,062 of the population of Medford speaks “Other indo-European languages” – with 7,979 of that population in the age range of an HOH;
- 3,514 of the population of Medford speaks “Asian and Pacific Island Languages” – with 3,227 of that population in the age range of an HOH; and
- 982 of the population of Medford speaks “Other Languages – with 810 of that population in the age range of an HOH.

The survey estimates that more than half of the above referenced population speaks English less than “very well.”

Our analysis indicates that the most frequent spoken non-English languages used by MHA’s target population and existing population are Haitian Creole and Spanish followed by Asian languages: Chinese, Cantonese and Vietnamese. This is reflected above as Haitian Creole is derived from indo-European languages and is the largest population in Medford from “LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME – 2009-2011 American Community Survey Estimates, U.S. Census – Medford City.”

Our research using “Massachusetts Department of Education - Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants - the Report *“In the aftermath of Question 2: Students with Limited English Proficiency in Massachusetts,”* By Atonia Owens., Rappoport Public Policy Fellow (June 2010)” indicates out of 22 Massachusetts communities surveyed, 77.5% of students with Limited English are “likely to be low income.” Medford is not included in this data; however, the surrounding communities of Everett, Malden and Somerville are included which allows us to estimate the population in Medford to be within the same range.

III. Types of Assistance available to LEP persons.

The contact between the MHA and LEP persons can occur by telephone, in-person, at meetings where information is exchanged, and the contact can occur with staff of any department at the MHA. As stated above in Section I. Goals of the Language Action Plan, the MHA will ensure that all LEP persons who come into contact with the MHA Programs are made aware of the MHA’s obligation to provide free interpretation services to facilitate their participation.

An example of oral assistance may be the need for an LEP resident to call in a maintenance work order. The MHA will be informing LEP residents that through staff or the language line, we will communicate in their primary language and this will be facilitated by the staff Translator/Interpreter or other MHA staff.

Other contact will include the exchange of translated documents to ensure LEP residents have meaningful accesses to the MHA’s programs, activities and requests – such as preparing a unit for extermination.

The MHA has determined that the following are Vital documents to be translated. Translation of vital documents will be based on our Four Factor Analyses and Annual Reviews of languages that fall within the "safe harbor," and as allowed by available appropriated funds. The Medford Housing Authority Vital Documents include:

- Public Housing Application
- Annual Reviews/Income Recertification forms
- Notices of Public Hearings
- Notices containing information regarding eligibility or participation criteria
- Notices advising of free language assistance
- Public Housing Lease
- 14 and 30 day Notice to Quit
- Notices of rights, denial, loss, or reduction of benefits or services
- Hearing notices
- Discrimination Complaints
- Section 3 Assessment Forms for Section 3 Residents
- Reasonable Accommodation procedures and request form
- Resident Handbook

If budget constraints prevent the MHA from immediately translating any of the above documents, the MHA will include with each document a note in the primary language of the LEP person to whom the communication is being sent – which note will inform the resident that he/she may call the Staff Translator/Interpreter, who will if necessary use an outside vendor to translate. In the case of a meeting or hearing the note will inform the LEP person of their right to have, at no cost, an interpreter present.

IV. Language Assistance to be provided

A. Identification of Language

●Use of "I speak cards, published by U.S. Census Bureau." The MHA has posted I Speak Cards and Language Line Solutions Cards in its Administrative Offices and will post Notices of Free Oral Interpretation Services in its developments. Applicants, public housing residents and voucher holders can use these cards to indicate their primary language. The MHA staff member in the Reception Department will make contact with the Staff Translator/Interpreter who will provide the interpretation services or utilize a telephone interpretation service.

●Notices of Free Oral Interpretation Services will be sent to all LEP persons and prominently posed in the Administrative Offices and developments of the MHA.

●The MHA will ask applicants and residents, through use of its applications and recertification forms, to identify the following: "Do you speak English? Language read Language Spoken" to ensure communication between staff and LEP person. This information will become part of the LEP persons written record and recorded in the electronic record of the MHA computer system.

B. Language Assistance Measures

- Oral Interpretation - Where feasible, MHA Staff Translator/Interpreter and other bilingual staff will be deployed to communicate with LEP individuals in their native languages and to assist them in reviewing materials, answering questions about MHA programs, and responding to MHA forms and information requests. The MHA Staff Translator/Interpreter speaks Haitian Creole and French, and another staff member speaks Spanish and Haitian Creole.

- Oral Interpretation - Telephone Support: the MHA will use the services of a professional telephone interpretation service whenever requested by an LEP individual and/or when an LEP person uses an I Speak card to signify that they speak a non-English language and/or when MHA staff recognizes the LEP person and his/her need for language services and a qualified staff person that speaks the appropriate language is unavailable. When these contacts involve review of MHA forms and procedures, MHA will schedule the call so that the telephone translator has the opportunity to first review the relevant form or procedure. MHA will only utilize interpretation services, which demonstrate a high degree of training and professionalization among the interpreter staff. While the MHA staff Translator/Interpreter will most often be the person to access the service, key MHA staff will be trained in how to access the services, which will be available as needed for LEP applicants, public housing residents or HCV participants. The Medford Housing Authority has contracted with Language Line Solutions and Catholic Charities.

- Oral Interpretation - In Person Assistance: In limited instances where telephone interpretation services or the use of bilingual MHA staff are determined insufficient to ensure meaningful access, MHA will provide qualified in-person interpretation services at no cost to the LEP individual either through local Medford community organizations or through contacts with qualified and trained interpretations services. Examples of contacts where in person assistance is likely to be required includes applicant or termination hearings and evictions. Due to the considerable expense involved in providing in-person assistance, MHA will generally strive to use telephone assistance. If the LEP person does not wish to use the MHA free interpretation services, the LEP person may provide their own qualified interpreters at their own expense; however, see below regarding use of family and friends as interpreters.

- Oral Interpretation - Use of Other Interpreters not provided by MHA: As noted above, LEP individuals will be informed that MHA will provide them with free access to oral interpretation services via bilingual staff or qualified, trained contractors as needed. If the LEP individual requests their own qualified, trained interpreter, this will be allowed at the individual's own expense. Use of family members and friends, especially minor children, as interpreters will generally be discouraged. Exceptions may be made where the contact with the LEP person is of a routine nature, one that does not involve confidential matters, or significant/complex matters impacting the applicant or resident's housing status, rent payments, or lease compliance issues,

and the LEP person signs a release that indicates alternative services were offered and waived. Staff will be advised to be alert to the potential of any conflict of interest or competency issues that may arise from the involvement of family or friends. If staff have questions about the appropriateness of allowing family and friends as interpreters, they will consult with Executive Director, Associate Executive Director, Director of Housing Programs or Director of Resident Services for guidance.

- **Written Translation:** MHA will translate the vital documents listed in Section III above into the most frequently used non-English languages that fall within the “safe harbor.” The Medford Housing Authority will translate vital documents into the primary languages identified by the Authority and will also utilize HUD documents, DHCD documents and the MassNAHRO Section 8 Applications that have been translated into languages other than English. However, only the English version of all MHA (including the MassNAHRO Section 8 Applications), HUD and DHCD documents that are required and vital for participation in Medford Housing Authority Programs, Services and Activities will be recognized by the Authority. If there is an inconsistency between the English version and the translated version of any document that is required for participation in any Medford Housing Authority program, service and activity, the wording of the English document will prevail. Any document that is a translation of a Medford Housing Authority issued legal document, for any program, activity or service offered by the Medford Housing Authority is provided merely as a convenience to assist in understanding your rights and obligations. The English language version of any Medford Housing Authority document is the official, legal, controlling document.

- **Communication with LEP Telephone Callers:** MHA will provide languages that fall within the “safe harbor” in their telephone answering system for callers to MHA's office. At this time Haitian Creole and Spanish will be transferred to the staff Translator/Interpreter or bi-lingual MHA staff who can speak Haitian Creole/Spanish when available. If needed, MHA will attempt to place a three-party call to the oral interpretation telephone service to determine if the service is able to identify the language spoken and provide an interpreter.

C. Staff Training and Coordinator

The MHA will provide periodic refresher reviews and/or trainings on LEP awareness and required assistance actions under this Language Action Plan for employees. Key staff may also participate in the Annual Review of LEP needs. New Employees will be made aware of this Language Action Plan with training for those in key positions.

The Executive Director will serve as the LEP Coordinator, and he may at anytime delegate certain responsibilities to MHA staff as he sees fit to meet the needs of LEP persons.

D. Provide Notice to LEP persons

To ensure LEP persons are aware of the language services available to them, the MHA will take the following actions:

- Post notices in MHA offices and developments.
- Partner with Community Agencies. The MHA has partnered and will continue to partner with community agencies who work with LEP persons to inform them of the MHA policies for LEP persons; incorporate multi-lingual messages in MHA outreach documents that are not translated – these standardized messages will be in Haitian Creole, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese and other languages known to the MHA from the 4 Factor Analysis and Annual Review.
- Inform resident associations of language assistance services.

V. Monitor and Update the LAP

Every three years the MHA will conduct a 4 Factor Analysis to be part of its Annual Plan and in the interim years conduct a review of its LEP Plan to determine:

- Whether there have been any significant changes in the composition or language needs of the LEP population in (LEP) persons serviced or encountered in the eligible service population;
- if additional vital documents require translation; and
- any issues related to serving LEP persons which may have emerged during the past year.

VI. Complaints

Any LEP person who believes that he/she has not been provided with adequate language assistance services should report that information to the Executive Director of the Medford Housing Authority (781) 396-7200 Ext. 106. If after working with the Executive Director or his designee a person believes the MHA is not taking reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to LEP persons, that individual may file a complaint with HUD's local Office of FHEO. For contact information of the local HUD office, go to the HUD website or call the housing discrimination toll free hotline at 800-669-9777 (voice) or 800-927-9275 (TTY).