

**Testimony of Steven Ettannani, Executive Director of External Affairs for the
New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection before the
Committees on Immigration and Governmental Operations**

**Remote Oversight Hearing on Language Access and Emergency Preparedness and
Introduction 63**

November 23, 2020

Good afternoon Chair Menchaca, Chair Cabrera, and members of the Committees. I am Steven Ettannani, Executive Director of External Affairs for the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection.

On behalf of Commissioner Salas, I want to share our thanks and appreciation to the Committees for continuing to elevate the voices of New York’s vibrant and diverse immigrant communities across the City. Now more than ever before, our collective work is vital to ensuring the health safety and prosperity of *all* New Yorkers.

DCWP Language Access Efforts

Our city has one of the most diverse marketplaces in the world, and language access is a special responsibility for our city government to take up on behalf of New Yorkers. Commissioner Salas, as an immigrant, and as an alumnus of our CUNY system and its commendable programs to serve ‘new’ New Yorkers of limited English proficiency, has since her appointment, made language access a priority for our agency across all our programs.

With the passage and implementation of Local Law 30, we have steadfastly worked to execute a language access plan that supports all our constituencies. First and foremost, whenever a New Yorker visits our offices, financial empowerment centers, licensing center, or small business support center, they will find multilingual signage and collateral informing them of the availability of free and real time interpretation services, through our vendor Language Line. Should constituents with limited English proficiency request assistance onsite, or contact us by other means, our staff is trained to utilize these interpretation services. Similarly, all our inspectors are trained with Language Line, and equipped with cards that describe the interpretation services in 20 languages. When they encounter a merchant with limited English proficiency in the field, they leverage these services to communicate during an inspection.

Language Access in the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As we testified to at our hearing on workplace safety last Friday, DCWP has continued to serve our workers, consumers, and businesses with important information and equitable language access. At the start of the pandemic, we launched “NYC [DOT] GOV [SLASH] DCWP – ALERTS” as a dedicated landing page for the public to view updated Department guidance during the crisis¹. On the webpage, the information we provide is translated in, at least, the ten designated citywide languages.

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dca/media/DCWP-Alerts-During-COVID19.page>

Other documents found on the landing page include those developed with New York City's Small Business Services and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. These resources, again each translated into the ten designated languages, address broad public safety protocols as well as guidance for what employers must do before they reopen, what workers should expect, and how to reach out to the City if there are questions.

Two weeks ago, we also issued reopening guidance on our landing page for domestic workers, many of whom have immigrant backgrounds or have preferences for languages other than English. As the home of the City's dedicated Paid Care Division, this guidance incorporates public health and safety guidelines on behalf of a vulnerable and traditionally underserved workforce trying to navigate safety in a unique workplace environment.

Lastly, since March, DCWP has conducted over 334 virtual and in-person outreach events. At our events, we provide translated outreach materials and real time interpretation services to New Yorkers. These events also include over 30 business education days where we visited more than 2,100 business, disseminating guidance on safe reopening standards and helping merchant associations and business improvement districts to distribute personal protective equipment.

Legislation – Introduction 63

Turning now to Introduction 63, this legislation requires the agency to record the language of preference of our licensees, translate post-inspection communications to licensees, and utilize their language preference for their specific post-inspection communication.

DCWP already offers licensees the opportunity, both on their new license applications or renewal applications, to choose a language of preference. Of more than 70,000 licensees, 2,500 have indicated a language preference other than English. I would also note that many businesses we inspect are not licensees of DCWP, although they are still required to comply with the City's Consumer Protection Law, the City's workplace laws, and other consumer and worker protections. As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, when we visit any business location, our inspectors are trained on how to access real time interpretation.

DCWP has concerns regarding the fiscal implications of this legislation and, broadly, how best to approach meaningful language access. Fiscally, the agency would encounter tremendous burden in translating documents outside the scope of our language access plan.

Furthermore, the materials contemplated by this bill for translation are often uniquely specific to an individual or business. Notice of hearings, for example, include direct references to the administrative code and even contemporaneous notes by our inspectors. In such cases, DCWP believes it is more effective to provide real time interpretation to our merchants should they have questions about their inspection.

Conclusion

To conclude, I want to reiterate that DCWP, and this Administration, are committed to providing equitable and fair language access to New Yorkers. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to any questions you may have.