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Civil Rights Department Releases New Language Access Guide for Public Services

Under California law, state-funded programs must take reasonable steps to support in-language access to services

SACRAMENTO – The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) today released a new guide to help state agencies and state-funded programs better understand state language access rules. Despite recent federal attempts to undermine in-language support for government programs, California continues to maintain strong protections to help ensure all Californians can access state services, regardless of where they come from or the language they speak.

"Government services are public services," **said CRD Director Kevin Kish.** "That means everyone should have a full and equal opportunity to access them, regardless of the language they speak. At a time when the federal government is rolling back resources for some, we're making it clear that our state's civil rights protections are for all Californians. I encourage everyone who works with the state or gets support from state-funded programs to read our new language access guide."

Full and Equal Access

Under California law, state-funded programs must take reasonable steps to support in-language access to services and activities for people they serve. These steps may include alternative communication services, such as interpretation, translation, or providing materials in other accessible formats like Braille. These alternatives must be provided to members of the public for free and state-funded programs must notify the people they serve of the availability of services in their language. However, the state's language access rules apply differently depending on the specific needs of the community served or program or activity being provided. For instance, an emergency room at a hospital will likely have different requirements compared to a small town's parks department. When making decisions about language access, covered agencies or programs must, at a minimum, consider the following:

- The number or proportion of people who use another language that they may serve or are likely to encounter.
- How often people who use another language encounter the program or activity.
- How important the program or activity is to people's lives.
- How important alternative means of communication are to a person's ability to access the program.
- The resources available to the program or agency.

Civil Rights for All

CRD continues to take action to protect the rights of all Californians, regardless of the language they speak or where they come from. Earlier this year, the department reached a settlement with Spectrum Mobile to resolve allegations that the company unlawfully denied service to an existing customer because of their immigration and citizenship status. CRD also worked with businesses across the state to help foster safe and inclusive environments for customers and staff. In 2024, CRD secured a $200,000 settlement after a Southern California preschool allegedly retaliated against a teacher's aide for speaking Spanish at work and the department also announced a $30,000 settlement after a property owner allegedly threatened a family with deportation and eviction. The same year, the Civil Rights Council secured final approval for updates to regulations regarding state-funded programs, including with respect to language access.

If you or someone you know has experienced discrimination, CRD may be able to assist you through its complaint process. The department also provides general information and factsheets online about civil rights protections.

CRD is also holding an online training open to the public that is specifically focused on helping state agencies and state-funded programs better understand their language access responsibilities on December 10 at 11:00 AM PT.

You can learn more by reading the new language access guide.

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The California Civil Rights Department (CRD) is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. CRD's mission is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state-funded programs and activities, and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit calcivilrights.ca.gov.