

Performance Oversight Testimony – Office of Human Rights
February 12, 2025
Testimony of Maggie Snow
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Good morning, Chairperson Nadeau and Committee members. Thank you for convening this hearing and for the opportunity to share testimony. My name is Maggie Snow. I am the Anti-Hunger Program Associate overseeing our SNAP work at D.C. Hunger Solutions. In my role, I provide direct support to D.C. residents experiencing hunger. In FY24, our organization prescreened over 1,400 residents and helped over 700 residents apply for SNAP. Most of the clients I assist speak Spanish and require translation services to access SNAP and other public benefits. All District residents deserve to easily access public benefits in their first language and feel welcomed and supported in doing so. I am a proud District resident and member of the DC Language Access Coalition (DCLAC) and in this testimony, I will offer three ways to improve language access in the District: improvement to the ESA phone tree so that it provides the same information in all languages, consistency in translation of paper and online forms, and finally, the passage of the Language Access Enforcement Amendment Act of 2025.

All District residents have the right to access public benefits information in their first language. When clients call the ESA service center, they are asked to “press one for English,” “two for Spanish,” and so on. When clients press one for English, they hear a helpful message that reminds them of the interview requirement for SNAP applicants and explains how they can check their case status online on District Direct. When clients press two for Spanish, they are immediately and abruptly placed on hold and connected with a call center representative who greets them in English before placing them on a second hold while they connect to a Language Line interpreter. This experience is off-putting and confusing to clients who may already be worried about calling in to the service center. Clients should have the same call experience regardless of their chosen language. When calling the ESA service center, they should be given the same recorded information about interviews and District Direct regardless of the language they select. Given that clients select their preferred language before pressing other options, call center representatives should connect with a Language Line interpreter *before* answering the call,

so the interpreter can greet the client in their first language. These changes would ensure equitable language access and make the call center service more welcoming and efficient.

Another area of concern is document translation. DHS and other agencies must ensure that all forms are fully translated into other languages. When certain lines of paper or online forms are written in English, clients do not have equal language access or a fair opportunity to accurately represent their situation. I recently assisted a non-English speaking client who provided me with copies of the paper SNAP recertification form they were asked to fill out at a service center. While most of the form was translated into their chosen language, one line was kept in English: “Our records show that your gross monthly unearned income is ____.” This is arguably the most important line of the entire recertification form because it gives clients a chance to report any changes to their income. Because the client did not understand this line, they reported their income incorrectly, which caused their benefits to decrease. While I was able to help the client correct their information and return their benefits to the correct amount, this situation could have been avoided had the client been provided with a recertification form that was fully translated in their chosen language. Incomplete or incorrect translations cause confusion, inaccurate reporting, and ultimately, incorrect determinations that take unnecessary time and effort to be corrected. [In FY23](#), D.C. reported a CAPER (Case and Processing Error Rate) of 58.79%, meaning 58.79% of cases saw inaccurate denial, termination, or suspension. Inadequate translation contributes to this rate. Clients work hard to accurately answer questions and provide supporting documentation, and they deserve proper translation to make the process as easy as possible.

Adjusting the ESA phone tree and ensuring consistency in translation will make it easier for District residents to apply for benefits regardless of their English proficiency. My final ask is that Committee members support the Language Access Enforcement Amendment Act of 2025. The Amendment strengthens language access in three ways. First, it offers a fine structure for agencies who violate the 2004 Language Access Act, requiring agencies to pay a \$2,500 fine per violation. Second, it allows OHR to conduct audits of agencies who repeatedly violate the Act and third, allows the public to access the findings of complaints. As a proud member of the Language Access Coalition, I urge you to support this Amendment that will support District

residents and OHR in holding agencies accountable. Please use [this link](#) to view the DC Language Access Coalition Proposal and [this link](#) to view the amendment.

These recommendations are the direct result of my daily interactions with clients who rely on language services to access public benefits. I urge the Committee to consider these recommendations to further support all residents seeking vital food and medical assistance. Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony on the performance of the Office of Human Rights.

Respectfully,

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