



The Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) supports the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as it secures the nation while preserving individual liberty, fairness, and equality under the law.



DHS Issues RFI on Environmental Justice Program

On December 18, 2023, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) posted to the Federal Register for public input a first-ever [Request for Information](#) (RFI), Docket ID: DHS-2023-0048, on the DHS environmental justice program. DHS is seeking public comment and feedback on barriers and challenges, suggestions, and ideas to help advance the Department’s environmental justice program, conduct meaningful engagement of the public in decision-making, and address environmental justice challenges that communities are facing related to DHS programs and activities. [View translations of the RFI.](#)

DHS is hosting three virtual information and listening sessions on January 19, 23, and 29, 2024, where participants can ask questions, comment, and share ideas in response to the questions in the RFI. Additional details on these sessions can be found [here](#), including how to register.

DHS has more direct contact with the public than any other federal government agency with over 260,000 employees leading a wide range of programs and activities with the potential to impact human health and the environment. The Department is committed to embedding environmental justice principles into those programs and activities. This effort will enable DHS to hear from the public directly to advance the Department’s Environmental Justice Program as well as implement further the April 2023 [Executive Order 14096](#), *Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All* and related authorities.

The Environmental Justice Program within DHS is co-led by the [Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties](#) and the Office of the Chief Readiness Support Officer’s [Sustainability and Environmental Programs](#). For more information, see the [DHS Environmental Justice](#) webpage.

DHS Issues Updated DHS Language Access Plan

Release Date: November 17, 2023

DHS joined interagency partners across the federal government in releasing its [updated language access plan](#). This important milestone underscores the Department’s commitment to ensuring that all people in the United States, regardless of the language they speak, have meaningful access to DHS programs and activities in accordance with [Executive Order 13166](#), *Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency*.

CRCL leads the Department's efforts to provide meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency. The Department issued its first Language Access Plan in 2012. The updated plan features accomplishments such as the launch of an online portal for filing allegations of civil rights and civil liberties violations that is available in multiple languages, regular engagement with communities about language access

Inside

[DHS Issues RFI on Environmental Justice Program](#)

[DHS Issues Updated DHS Language Access Plan](#)

[2023 WPS Strategy and National Action Plan Released](#)

[CRCL Releases FY 2022 Annual Report](#)

[Message from CRCL on Title VI Protections](#)

[CRCL and DOJ Meet with Community Leaders](#)

[DHS Releases Physical Security Goals for Faith-Based Communities](#)

[EO Directs DHS to Lead the Responsible Development of AI](#)

[CRCL Increases Civil Rights Evaluation Tool Engagement](#)

[DHS General Counsel Joins CRCL All-Staff Meeting](#)

[CRCL Meets with Community Partners in Philadelphia](#)

in DHS, and the establishment of a multi-award language services contract for DHS Components, which requires standards and qualifications for interpreters and translators to ensure these language services are of high quality.

“Today’s updated plan highlights the significant steps DHS has taken to advance language access,” **said CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia.** “In the decade since the Department issued its first Language Access Plan, it has reduced barriers to utilizing DHS programs, further supported workforce in public-facing roles, and deepened engagement with diverse communities nationwide. Our office is honored to have worked with DHS Components to meet their language access obligations and, with these updates, put a strong overarching plan in place to guide the Department.”

The release of the DHS language access plan is part of a broader federal government initiative to improve language access and coincides with the one-year anniversary of Attorney General Merrick B. Garland’s [memorandum](#) directing federal agencies to revise their language access plans, share best practices, and exchange information about language access initiatives and efforts in compliance with Executive Order 13166.

Additional information about language access at DHS is available on the [DHS Language Access webpage](#). Learn more about the [DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties](#).

2023 Women, Peace, and Security Strategy and National Action Plan Released

The U.S. government is committed to advancing women’s participation in peace and security processes and integrating gender perspectives in U.S. foreign policy and national security decision-making through implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Act of 2017. In doing so, we emphasize UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325’s premise that the core WPS principles of women’s participation and protection are critical for effective conflict prevention and resolution, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping efforts. Women and girls play an integral role in building and maintaining global peace and security.

The Biden-Harris Administration recently released the [2023 U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security and National Action Plan](#) highlighting interagency efforts, including DHS, that advance gender equity and equality to achieve and sustain peace and security around the world. The updated Strategy reflects critical shifts in our global landscape—including geopolitical changes, a rise in climate-related crises, and advancements in technology—and maintains a strong focus on five core lines of effort. Read the White House [Fact Sheet](#) for more information on the updated Strategy.

CRCL Releases FY 2022 Annual Report to Congress

CRCL is pleased to announce the release of its [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2022 Annual Report to Congress](#). In accordance with 6 U.S.C. § 345 and 42 U.S.C. § 2000ee-1, the report highlights CRCL’s activities and accomplishments, which include:

- *Intelligence Product Review and Training*
- *Conditions of Detention*
- *Faith-Based Community Engagement*
- *DHS Civil Rights Evaluation Tool*
- *DHS Gender Policy Working Group*
- *United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*
- *Engagement with Historically Black Colleges and Universities*
- *Compliance with Language Access Legal and Policy Requirements*
- *Case Management Pilot Program*

These efforts continue to reflect the Department’s dedication to securing the country while protecting our freedoms and safeguarding our core civil rights and civil liberties values of liberty, fairness, and equality under the law. *Read the full report here:* [CRCL Annual Reports | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#).

Message from CRCL on Protecting Individuals from Discrimination Based on Actual or Perceived Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics

November 17, 2023

In light of reported incidents of hate and discrimination at college campuses and other locations across the U.S., the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties reminds the public that Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics and prohibits forms of antisemitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, Islamophobic, and related forms of discrimination and bias in federally funded programs and activities.

DHS again affirms its commitment to counter unlawful discrimination and protect the civil rights of all communities, including faith communities. Below is the recently released DHS Fact Sheet, translated into six languages, which contains information on how to file complaints about such forms of discrimination arising in DHS-funded programs.

[FACT SHEET: Protecting Individuals from Discrimination Based on Actual or Perceived Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#)

Translations of this statement are available at [Title VI at DHS | Homeland Security](#).

CRCL and DOJ Meet with Community Leaders

In November, CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia joined U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Attorney General Garland, Associate Attorney General Gupta, and Assistant Attorney General Clark in co-hosting the quarterly interagency meeting with leaders representing Muslim, Arab, Sikh, South Asian, and Hindu (MASSAH) communities. DHS senior leadership from the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and the Office of Partnership and Engagement (OPE) also participated in the meeting. The regular MASSAH meetings first began following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The organizations asked DOJ and other federal agencies to continue to take actions to protect their communities from unlawful discrimination and violence. During the meeting, organizations had an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns regarding increased hate crimes and discrimination, travel and immigration matters, and first amendment protections, among others.

DHS Releases Physical Security Goals for Faith-Based Communities

Release Date: December 6, 2023

Building on longstanding efforts and redoubling work to support faith-based communities in response to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, today, DHS, through Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), released new resources to help houses of worship and other faith-based organizations enhance their security. These [Physical Security Performance Goals](#) – modeled after the successful [Cybersecurity Performance Goals](#) – are a collection of cost-effective actions specifically tailored for faith-based organizations that can be implemented to reduce risk without sacrificing accessibility. This is the latest resource the Biden-Harris Administration is offering to faith-based organizations in response to the current heightened threat environment.

“In this continued heightened threat environment, the Department of Homeland Security is committed to protecting every American’s right to live, express, and worship their faith freely and in safety,” **said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas**. “The physical security performance goals we are releasing today provide churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith-based institutions with cost-effective, accessible, and readily implementable strategies to enhance their security and reduce the risk to their communities. I strongly urge all faith-based institutions to take advantage of this new resource and incorporate the security practices it outlines.”

Read the entire [Press Release here](#).

On October 25, 2023, DHS and the FBI issued a [Public Service Announcement](#) (PSA) to highlight potential threats in the United States from a variety of actors in response to the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, including

additional calls by foreign terrorist organizations to their supporters seeking to foment violence in the West. The PSA states “the volume and frequency of threats to Americans, especially those in the Jewish, Arab American, and Muslim communities in the United States, have increased, raising our concern that violent extremists and lone offenders motivated by or reacting to ongoing events could target these communities.”

In light of this heightened threat environment, we encourage organizations planning large-scale events to work with their state and local law enforcement and homeland security officials for any security concerns. Those officials are familiar with how to request potential additional federal support if they have unmet needs.

Biden-Harris Administration Executive Order Directs DHS to Lead the Responsible Development of Artificial Intelligence

Release Date: October 30, 2023

On October 30, 2023, President Biden issued a landmark [Executive Order](#) to promote the safe, secure, and trustworthy development and use of artificial intelligence (AI). The Biden-Harris Administration places the highest urgency on governing the development and use of AI safely and responsibly, and is therefore advancing a coordinated, federal government-wide approach to doing so. DHS will play a critical part in ensuring that AI use is safe and secure nation-wide. DHS’s own use of AI will be achieved responsibly, while advancing equity and appropriately safeguarding privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.

The direction provided in the EO is consistent with DHS's innovative work in ensuring the safe, secure, and responsible use and development of AI. DHS will manage AI in critical infrastructure and cyberspace, promote the adoption of AI safety standards globally, reduce the risks that AI can be used to create weapons of mass destruction (WMD), combat AI-related intellectual property theft, and help the United States attract and retain skilled talent. The EO follows on DHS’s work deploying AI responsibly to advance its missions for the benefit of the American people.

Read the entire [DHS Fact Sheet](#) and learn more about the Department’s approach to ensuring AI is used responsibly and protects civil rights, civil liberties, and privacy. To learn more about DHS’s work in AI, visit <https://www.dhs.gov/ai>.

CRCL Increases Civil Rights Evaluation Tool Engagement with DHS Grant Recipients

Each year, DHS provides grant funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, nonprofit agencies, and the private sector to build and sustain capabilities to prevent, protect against, respond to and recover from acts of terrorism and other disasters. In FY 2023, [DHS announced funding allocations](#) totaling nearly \$2 billion in competitive and non-competitive grants to help prepare our nation against threats and natural disasters.

When an organization receives a grant or other type of financial assistance from DHS, those recipient organizations cannot discriminate in their programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin (including limited English proficiency), disability, age, sex, or religion. CRCL is responsible for ensuring recipient compliance with federal civil rights laws, and in carrying out that responsibility, manages the [Civil Rights Evaluation Tool \(CRET\)](#) program. The CRET is a data collection instrument and technical assistance tool to assist recipients of DHS grants and other forms of financial assistance in understanding and meeting their existing requirements under civil rights laws and regulations, including the development of civil rights-related policies and procedures.

In FY 2023, CRCL partnered with the DHS Office of the Chief Information Officer to update the CRET by enhancing its data collection and analysis capabilities and improving user interface, which ultimately boosted engagement with DHS recipients by 485%. These improvements allowed CRCL and FEMA to CRET review submissions and provide feedback and technical assistance on addressing gaps and refining policies and procedures in a timely and streamlined manner.

Learn more about the [CRET and access civil rights resources](#) for recipients of DHS Financial Assistance.

DHS General Counsel Joins CRCL All-Staff Meeting

Last month, CRCL was pleased to welcome DHS General Counsel Jonathan Meyer in joining CRCL Officer Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia for a fireside chat during CRCL's all-staff meeting. During their discussion, Ms. Sivaprasad Wadhia and Mr. Meyer reflected on CRCL's and OGC's strong partnership, highlighting many accomplishments achieved over the years. Mr. Meyer also shared his personal and professional experiences leading him to the role of DHS General Counsel and thanked CRCL staff for their continued professionalism and expertise in ensuring civil rights and civil liberties considerations are embedded in all aspects of the DHS mission.



CRCL Meets with Community Partners in Philadelphia

This month, representatives from CRCL traveled to Philadelphia, PA to hold a series of meetings with local community stakeholders. CRCL's Community Engagement Section leads efforts to engage with diverse American communities in metropolitan areas across the country to hear community concerns regarding DHS programs and policies, share information on the Department's priorities, and provide information on avenues for redress and complaints.

During the meetings, CRCL representatives provided information about [CRCL's complaint process](#) and shared updates on DHS-wide language access efforts, including the release of the updated [DHS language access plan](#). Attendees had an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns regarding the following topics: rise in courthouse arrests by ICE, access and adequacy of mental health care for individuals in ICE detention, and language access issues in local ICE processing center, among others.

In the year ahead, CRCL will continue to conduct outreach in cities across the U.S. We want to hear from you! If you have questions or would like to learn more about CRCL's community engagement efforts, please reach out to communityengagement@hq.dhs.gov.

CRCL on the Road, November/December*

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

On November 2-3, CRCL conducted engagements with diverse stakeholders Philadelphia.

New York, New York

On November 15, CRCL conducted engagements with diverse stakeholders in New York City.

Montgomery County, Maryland

On December 21, CRCL met with stakeholders in Montgomery County, Maryland.

New England

On November 6-8, CRCL conducted engagements with diverse stakeholders in locations across New England including Boston, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

Chicago, Illinois

On December 4, CRCL conducted engagements with diverse stakeholders in the Chicago area.

*CRCL's Community Engagement team conducts in-person, virtual, and hybrid engagements with federal, state, local, and civil society stakeholders across the country. We remain available to respond to any stakeholder questions or concerns via email at: CommunityEngagement@hq.dhs.gov.

Additional information, and contacting us

The goal of this periodic newsletter is to inform members of the public about the activities of the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, including: how to file complaints; ongoing and upcoming projects; opportunities to offer comments and feedback; etc. We distribute our newsletters via our stakeholder email list and make them available to community groups for redistribution. Issues of the newsletter can be accessed online at: www.dhs.gov/crcl-newsletter.

If you would like to receive this newsletter via email, want to request back issues, or have other comments or questions, please let us know by emailing crcloutreach@hq.dhs.gov. For more information, including how to make a civil rights or civil liberties complaint about DHS activities, visit: www.dhs.gov/crcl.

CRCL Phone: 202-401-1474 • Toll Free: 866-644-8360 • TTY: 202-401-0470 • Toll Free TTY: 866-644-8361

DISCLAIMER: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provides links to non-government websites for convenience and informational purposes only. These websites may contain information that is copyrighted with restrictions on reuse. Permission to use copyrighted materials must be obtained from the original source and cannot be obtained from DHS. DHS is not responsible for the content of external websites linked to or referenced from the DHS web server. DHS neither endorses the information or content of external websites, nor guarantees the accuracy of the information contained on external websites. When you select a link to an external website, you are leaving the DHS site.

 **Follow the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on Facebook at: facebook.com/CivilRightsandCivilLiberties.**