

Message from the Secretary

I am pleased to share the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Fiscal Year 2012 plan for providing meaningful access to homeland security programs and activities to people with limited English proficiency. At DHS, we recognize the importance of being able to communicate effectively with all individuals across our many missions and functions, not just with those who speak English.

In FY 2011, DHS undertook a Department-wide effort to assess our current language needs and existing language services. Among the many examples of existing language services offered by the Department, detailed in the attached plan, are U.S. Customs and Border Protection's unique requirement that all Border Patrol Agents, and CBP Officers working along the Southwest border, speak functional Spanish. Similarly, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services provides information on immigration and naturalization in multiple languages, and the Transportation Security Administration has signage available in eight languages. In addition, the Federal Emergency Management Agency provides written materials in multiple languages to disaster survivors, has numerous non-English websites, and trains Disaster Assistance employees on identifying and addressing language needs in impacted areas. These and countless other examples demonstrate the Department's commitment to ensuring appropriate language access throughout its missions and functions.

However, there are additional steps that DHS can take to improve communication with individuals with limited English proficiency. The DHS Language Access Plan, which was informed by the experiences and expertise of staff throughout the Department, as well as comments from external stakeholders representing diverse communities across the Nation, provides a framework for enhancing the access of individuals with limited English proficiency to DHS services and activities.

The Language Access Plan states:

It is the policy of DHS to provide meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency to operations, services, activities, and programs that support each Homeland Security mission area by providing quality language assistance services in a timely manner. DHS Components, therefore, should incorporate language access considerations into their routine strategic and business planning, identify and translate crucial documents into the most frequently encountered languages, provide interpretive services where appropriate, and educate personnel about language access responsibilities and how to utilize available language access resources.

Over the next year, each DHS Component (whether operational or support) that has contact with the public is required to complete its own language access plan to implement that policy.

Your input is valuable to us. Please send any comments or questions that can help inform the DHS Component plans currently underway to the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) at crcloutreach@dhs.gov, or go to www.dhs.gov/crcl for additional information.


Janet Napolitano
Secretary of Homeland Security