



Member, Board of Supervisors
District 4

City and County of San Francisco

KATY TANG
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**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS PASS AMENDMENTS TO LANGUAGE ACCESS
ORDINANCE INTRODUCED BY SUPERVISOR KATY TANG**

*Legislation strengthens language access by removing tiered system among departments,
centralizing complaint process, and streamlining reporting requirements*

The Board of Supervisors passed legislation strengthening the Language Access Ordinance (LAO) on March 3. Sponsored by Supervisor Katy Tang, the legislation's key amendments included eliminating the tiered system among city departments so that all are providing equal access to city services by fiscal year 2016-2017, centralizing the complaint process within the Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA), and streamlining the reporting requirements for the Departments' Annual Compliance Plan so that accurate and effective information is captured.

"It is vital that we ensure our city is doing its best to provide equal access to all of our residents," said Supervisor Tang. "Our city has been a leader when it comes to providing language access, but we wanted to ensure that the remaining gaps in language access consistency, quality, budgeting and implementation are removed."

Supervisor Norman Yee, a co-sponsor of the legislation, also introduced an amendment to require formerly Tier 2 departments to report on their progress in adhering to the new requirements in six months.

"Access to timely and accurate information in language is essential when nearly half the city speaks a language other than English at home and one in every three residents is an immigrant," said Supervisor Yee. "We are proud that San Francisco has the strongest local language access law in the nation, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen it."

According to the United States Census Bureau's 2008-2012 American Community Survey, 36 percent of San Franciscans are foreign-born and 45.2 percent over the age of five speak a language other than English at home. More than 112 languages are spoken in the San Francisco Bay Area, with at least 28 different languages spoken in the City alone.



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“Cities and counties must contribute to an environment that is welcoming and nurturing for Limited-English Proficient, immigrant and vulnerable residents,” said Adrienne Pon, Executive Director of OCEIA. “With the nation’s immigration system in shambles, it is essential that we take innovative steps to ensure integration, engagement and full civic participation. These amendments to the LAO will make the law much more effective.”

OCEIA oversees citywide compliance with the LAO, as well as provides technical assistance and language access grants to the community.

In addition to city departments, non-profit organizations have been instrumental in assisting residents with access to services. The Language Access Network was a vital partner in shaping the legislation in response to residents’ experiences and feedback.

"These amendments will help to provide the city with a more accurate picture of what is really happening with language access for the immigrant community,” said Grace Lee, Policy Director for Chinese for Affirmative Action. “When LAO violations happen, non-English speakers are reluctant to file a complaint, but the complaint process has been improved to be more accessible and to provide meaningful resolutions. These improvements to LAO oversight will lift up the experiences of immigrants and non-English speakers who have been trying to access public services for so long."

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