

## **Cecil County, Maryland's Language Access Plan**

It is the purpose of this policy to provide guidance to employees as to their legal obligations (in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) when they have contact with an individual(s) who is limited English proficient (LEP), because language barriers can sometimes inhibit or even prohibit individuals who are LEP from gaining meaningful access and participation in Cecil County, Maryland's services.

Cecil County personnel will take reasonable steps to provide language assistance services to LEP individuals whom they may encounter in the course of their duties, at no cost to the LEP individual.

### **Policy**

It is the policy of Cecil County, Maryland to take reasonable steps to ensure timely and meaningful access to all individuals, regardless of national origin or primary language (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, § 601, 42 USC § 2000d). It is the responsibility of the County staff to provide free access to language assistance services for all contacts with limited English proficiency. If it is determined that language assistance is needed, Cecil County, Maryland must take reasonable steps to inform the individual that language assistance services are available. If such services are requested, Cecil County, Maryland shall take reasonable steps to provide language assistance to LEP individuals.

### **Definitions**

**Limited English Proficient (LEP)** - Designates individuals whose primary language is not English and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English. LEP individuals may be competent in certain types of communication (e.g., speaking or understanding), but still be LEP for other purposes (e.g., reading or writing). Similarly, LEP designations are context-specific. An individual may possess sufficient English language skills to function in one setting, but these skills may be insufficient in other situations.

**Language Assistance Services** – Services that encompass all oral and written language services needed to assist LEP individuals to communicate effectively with staff, and to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access and an equal opportunity to participate fully in the services, programs, or activities administered by Cecil County, Maryland. However, employees are not required to use language assistance in social communications with LEP individuals. Social communications include greetings and other limited communication that do not involve responding to complaints, exercising prosecutorial authority, or engaging in any other substantive communication.

**Meaningful Access** - Language assistance that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the LEP individual. For LEP individuals, meaningful access denotes

access that is not unduly restricted, unnecessarily delayed, and is equal to programs or activities provided to English proficient individuals.

**Vital Documents** – Paper or electronic written material that contains information that is critical for accessing office programs or activities, or is required by law.

**Sight Translation** – Oral rendering of written text or a document into spoken language by an interpreter without change in the meaning based on a visual review of the original text or document.

**Direct “In-Language” Communication** – Monolingual communication in a language other than English between a multilingual staff or vendor and an LEP person.

**Authorized Employee Interpreter or Translator** – An employee of the Cecil County who is bilingual and has successfully completed agency-recognized interpreter and/or translator testing and is authorized to act as such an interpreter and/or translator.

**Qualified Interpreter or Translator** - Any person confirmed by Cecil County, Maryland as having the knowledge, skills and ability to perform interpretation or translation services.

**Bilingual** - The ability to communicate in two languages fluently, including the ability to communicate in both English and another language. For purposes of this policy, employees, in order to be identified as bilingual, must initially and periodically demonstrate, through a testing procedure recognized by the Cecil County, Maryland, their level of skill and competence; such that, the Cecil County, Maryland is able to determine the purposes for which an employee's language skills may be used.

**Interpretation** - The act of listening to a communication in one language (source language) and orally converting it to another language (target language) while retaining the same meaning.

**LEP Coordinator** – The Office Manager or his/her designee is responsible for coordinating and implementing all aspects of the Cecil County, Maryland LEP services. The LEP Coordinator reports directly to the County Attorney.

**Primary Language** - The language in which an individual is most effectively able to communicate.

**Translation** - The replacement of written text from one language (source language) into an equivalent written text (target language).

**Volunteer Translator** – An individual that volunteers to translate or interpret, but has not yet been evaluated by Cecil County, Maryland for their level of proficiency in a target language. This may include family, friends or acquaintances.

### **Notification of Language Assistance Services**

Cecil County, Maryland provides notice that no cost language assistance services are available. Notices of the services will be posted and/or displayed in public areas of the Cecil County Administration building.

### **Most Likely Non-English Languages to be Encountered in Cecil County, Maryland**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 American Community Survey, other languages spoke in Cecil County, Maryland was listed as an "N" entry. From the Notes on the American Community Survey, an 'N' entry in the estimate and margin of error columns indicates that data for this geographic area cannot be displayed because the number of sample cases is too small.

### **Identification of LEP Individuals and their Language**

Cecil County, Maryland will utilize reasonably available tools, such as language identification cards ("I SPEAK cards), when attempting to determine an LEP individual's primary language in an effort to avoid mistakes when identifying a language. Cecil County, Maryland will maintain these tools in areas of public access.

Personnel may determine whether an individual is LEP through:

- Permitting self-identification by the LEP person (if the individual is able to communicate the language that he or she speaks);
- Asking open-ended questions requiring a narrative response. Where an individual is unable provide a fluent narrative response in English, he or she shall be deemed LEP;
- Using language identification cards ("I Speak" cards);
- Verifying the language spoken with the assistance of an authorized employee interpreter or with the assistance of a qualified telephone interpreter. Noticing behavior that suggests a person is LEP. For example, an individual speaks in incomplete or fragmented sentences, uses words that suggest a request for language assistance, or alternates from English into another language may be LEP.

Cecil County, Maryland has a contract with International Translators (IT) for translation services. To contact IT call 410-996-5205, let them know you are with Cecil County, Maryland and that you need translation services in whatever language you have identified.

### **Oral Interpretation**

Cecil County, Maryland will make reasonable efforts to provide assistance to LEP individuals and document any services provided. The agency will document the name of the person who provided the service and any credentials qualifying that person to act as an interpreter.

### **Telephone Interpreter Services**

The LEP Coordinator will maintain a list of qualified telephonic interpreter services and make it available to all agency personnel. These services shall be available to assist agency personnel in communicating with LEP individuals.

Telephone interpreters are provided through IT, which provides three-way-call service that can be used:

- When an LEP individual calls the Cecil County, Maryland.
- When Cecil County, Maryland's staff call an LEP individual in relation to a service provided by Cecil County, Maryland.
- When an LEP individual visits Cecil County, Maryland without prior notice and a qualified in-person interpreter cannot be arranged in a timely fashion.
- When Cecil County, Maryland staff are in the field and unexpectedly encounter an LEP individual.

### **In-Person Interpreters**

Multilingual staff or contract interpreters that have passed language proficiency assessments and undergone language assistant training (as described below) may provide "in-language" assistance to LEP individuals. Examples of assistance include, but are not limited to:

- When a LEP individual calls Cecil County, Maryland, and the call taker needs assistance to identify the primary language of the caller;
- When a LEP individual is requesting services of Cecil County, Maryland; and
- When a LEP individual is in need of other community resources that are available to them.

### **Translation Services**

The LEP Coordinator will maintain a list of qualified translation services and make it available to agency personnel in order to assist in the understanding of written text, and with the translation of vital documents, or case related materials. The LEP Coordinator will likewise maintain a list of translation services or individual translators who are deemed to be unqualified, or whose services have been inconsistent with providing translation services.

## **Printed Forms and Documents**

The LEP Coordinator will determine which Vital Documents will be translated based on importance and frequency used. The LEP Coordinator will make these documents available to agency personnel and other individuals as necessary.

## **LEP Coordinator**

It shall be the duty of the LEP Coordinator to:

- Review and maintain the policies and procedures of the Language Access Plan;
- Review and coordinate the creation of non-English Vital Documents, if needed;
- Assure vendors providing interpretation and translation services have certification listing their proficiency as recognized through American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) appropriate to services provided;
- Assure that Cecil County, Maryland employees providing interpretation and translation services have certification listing their proficiency as recognized through the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) appropriate to services they provide; and
- Occasionally review the effectiveness of Cecil County, Maryland Language Assistance Services. The review may be done by analysis of current or historical data, surveys of staff and customers, solicitation of feedback from community groups and analysis of changing community demographics.

## **Complaints**

Cecil County, Maryland shall ensure that LEP persons have reasonable access to language services for the purpose of filing a complaint regarding Cecil County, Maryland services or actions. Cecil County, Maryland shall utilize a Cecil County, Maryland qualified or authorized employee interpreter or translator, if available, when conducting interviews of LEP complaints. Cecil County Maryland shall make interpretation services accessible and provide certain translated forms and documents, which explain and instruct LEP individuals on the complaint process. The LEP Coordinator should periodically review and update all translated forms given to LEP individuals regarding the complaint process.

## **Agency Training**

To ensure that all staff who may have contact with LEP individuals are properly trained, Cecil County, Maryland will provide training on this policy and related procedures. This will include how to access Cecil County, Maryland authorized telephonic and in-person interpreters, and other available resources. Training will be provided annually for all employees.

## **Authorized Employee Interpreter Selection, Qualifications and Training:**

### **Selection:**

Cecil County, Maryland personnel that possess skills in a language other than English (i.e. bilingual) should be tested to have their skill level identified.

- Staff may volunteer for the duty of an Authorized Employee Interpreter or Translator based on their tested skill level and agency needs.
- New employees that have designated a bilingual skill during the hiring process shall be tested within the employees first three months of employment.
- Those selected for the position of an Authorized Employee Interpreter or Translator shall serve at the pleasure of the County Executive under the supervision of the LEP Coordinator.
- Employees identified as bilingual will have their language skills assessed by a language testing agency, selected by the LEP Coordinator, which adheres to the standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR). Upon completion, the Cecil County, Maryland shall receive and review the results of the assessment.
- An employee's level of participation in interpretation/translation may be limited by the level of proficiency determined by the assessment testing. This testing will be periodically repeated to determine the employee's ability to communicate information accurately in both English and the target language.
- An employee's level of participation in interpretation/translation duties may be enhanced or limited by the level of competency determined by the assessment testing compared to previous testing.

### **Qualifications:**

Any employee designated by Cecil County, Maryland to act as an Authorized Employee Interpreter and/or Translator must:

- Maintain competence in both English and the involved non-English language;
- Have an understanding of the functions of an interpreter and/or translator that allows for correct and effective translation/interpretation;
- Be able to identify and employ the appropriate mode of interpreting (e.g., consecutive, simultaneous, or sight translation), translating, or can communicate fluently in the target language;
- Have knowledge in both languages of any specialized legal terms or concepts;
- Be willing to account for the accuracy and trustworthiness of the interpretation or translation in a court proceeding;

- Have the ability to understand and adhere to the interpreter role without deviating into other roles such as counselor or legal adviser. The interpreter must not engage in third party Direct “In-Language” communication conversations outside of the understanding of the Cecil County, Maryland representative.
- Be knowledgeable of the confidentiality, impartiality, and ethical issues involved when acting as a language conduit.
- The LEP Coordinator shall be responsible for coordinating periodic training with the Authorized Employee Interpreter or Translator

### **Monitoring and Updating the LEP Plan**

Cecil County, Maryland’s language access plan will be reviewed annually, approximately 60 days prior to the annual training, and will be updated as needed. This plan is designed to be flexible, and should be viewed as a work in progress. As such it is important that the annual review assess:

- Whether there have been any significant changes in the demographics or language needs of the LEP population;
- If additional vital documents require translations; and
- Review any issues or problems related to serving LEP persons which may have emerged during the past year and identify recommended actions to provide more responsive and effective language assistance.

Cecil County, Maryland’s language access plan will be available to the public and staff on the Cecil County, Maryland’s official website at: [www.ccgov.org](http://www.ccgov.org). LEP persons may obtain copies/translations of the plan upon request. Questions about the language access policy and plan should be directed to the LEP Coordinator at 410-996-8300.