



Your Right to Assistance in Your Language: Basic Information about Federal Language Access Rights

Under U.S. law, if you are seeking services from a government agency or an organization funded by the U.S. government, you must be provided with assistance in your language.

What are language access services?

Language access services include a free interpreter and free translation of important documents. An agency cannot force you to provide your own interpreter (such as a friend or family member, and it is recommended that you do not use a family member or friend even if they volunteer) or ask you to pay for an interpreter or translation provided by the agency.

What is an interpreter?

When people speak different languages, an interpreter helps them talk to each other. An interpreter can work in person or over the phone.

Where am I entitled to language access services?

If you do not speak English well, you are entitled to language access services at:

- federal courts
- state and local courts that receive money from the U.S. government
- federal agencies such as the Social Security Administration and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service
- state and local government agencies that receive money from the U.S. government such as the your local social services or welfare office and the unemployment office

About this Guide

This guide was created by the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York in partnership with the New York LawHelp Consortium and Pro Bono Net, with support from the Legal Services Corporation Technology Initiative Grant program.

To read all of the guides in this series, visit NYLawHelp.org or LawHelp.org.

Where am I entitled to language access services (continued)?

- legal services offices that receive money from the Legal Services Corporation or another agency of the U.S. government to provide free legal services
- police departments that receive money from the U.S. government
- hospitals that receive money from the U.S. government
- schools that receive money from the U.S. government

Remember, agencies that receive money from the U.S. government cannot refuse you services just because you do not speak English.

I was not provided with language access services. How do I file a complaint?

If you were not provided with language access services, you may have a claim for national origin discrimination. To file a complaint, contact:

Federal Coordination and Compliance Section - NWB
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530
(888) 848-5306 - English and Spanish (Ingles y Español)
(202) 307-2222 (voice)
(202) 307-2678 (TDD)
www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/complaint.php

The agency that you want to complain about may also have a way to file a complaint about not receiving services in your own language.

For More Information

Looking for more information on this topic? Visit LawHelp.org and select your state to find other self-help resources and information about free and low-cost legal aid providers in your area.

Disclaimer

This guide was prepared for general information purposes only. The information it contains is not legal advice. Legal advice is dependent upon the specific circumstances of each situation. Also, the law may vary from state to state. Some information in this guide may not be correct for your state. To find local resources, visit LawHelp.org and select your state.