

# THE STATE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS IN NEW JERSEY

## PROGRESS REPORT

### JUNE 2025

#### BACKGROUND: NEW JERSEY'S HISTORIC LANGUAGE ACCESS LAW

On January 12, 2024, New Jersey adopted a law mandating **all state government entities that provide direct services to the public to provide interpretation services and to translate vital documents** into at least seven of the most common non-English languages spoken in New Jersey.

**Agencies must also translate vital documents**, which include but are not limited to legal information about accessing, keeping, losing, or being denied program services or benefits; documents required by law; and documents that explain legal rights, including:

- Notices regarding the reduction, denial, or termination of benefits
- Informational documents regarding access to or eligibility for public services or benefits
- Intake forms
- Complaint forms

The legislation allowed for a full year for agencies to provide language access in the first five most-spoken non-English languages and an additional year for providing language access in the next two languages.

#### KEY DEADLINES

##### JANUARY 12, 2025

All NJ state entities that provide direct services to the public were required to translate all vital documents into:

- Spanish
- Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese)
- Korean
- Portuguese
- Gujarati

##### JANUARY 12, 2026

Agencies must translate all vital documents into:

- Arabic
- Haitian Creole

#### Bill Signing Statements January 12, 2024

NJ Dept. of Human Services' Office of New Americans Director Johanna Calle, whose office is responsible for supporting bill implementation across state agencies, said of the law:

"Language barriers can make it very difficult for New Jersey's immigrant communities to navigate government programs and access important information, services and worker protections as they make our state their home. The new laws signed by Governor Murphy today will break down these barriers and reinforce New Jersey's commitment to supporting and building trust with the communities we serve."

NJ Attorney General Matthew Platkin, whose office is responsible for issuing guidance to state agencies on language access implementation, said:

"I applaud Governor Murphy and the Legislature for once again demonstrating their ongoing commitment to making New Jersey a place of inclusion, where we recognize, respect and protect the rights of all. [...] Increasing language access for vital government services will help keep our residents safe, healthy, and properly informed."

## WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

New Jersey's language access law is a step forward—but without real follow-through, our communities stay at risk. At the start of the pandemic, many immigrant parents didn't get clear info about school closures or remote learning. Early vaccine texts from NJ.GOV had typos and mistranslations, adding to low trust and low vaccination rates. These failures show why we need a public report on how language access is being implemented. Our communities deserve clear, accurate info—no matter what language we speak.

**"I work for a county college and also volunteer with a county sexual violence services agency and I have noticed a lot. ALL of us on staff keep screaming that we need/want more multilingual resources... Many documents that are already translated need to be updated with current law, and the updated documents will likely not be translated this time around due to cuts.**

**So many people are being left out because the resources we have are inaccessible. [...]** We are serving more and more people who do not speak English every single day; it is absolutely inexcusable to not be offering multilingual resources at this point."

## FROM OUR COMMUNITY:

"I take my father to the hospitals in New York because I know they are much better at translation. With all the medical terms that I can't translate, it's important they get it right."

"I go on to [a] state website and I don't know where to click for information in my language."

"My mother has been in this country for over 50 years, but has never voted in local elections. I think if more [voting] materials were available in Korean, she would."



## ARE KEY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE LAW?

To assess each department's compliance, we developed a scoring system:

- Hiring or Designating a Language Access Coordinator – 10 Points
- Publishing a Language Access Plan – 20 Points
- Translating Vital Documents into the Top Five Most Spoken Languages – 5 Points Per Language
- Translating Vital Documents into the Next Two Most Spoken Languages – 5 Points Per Language
- Providing Interpretation Services for Key Services – 5 Points per Target Language
- Offering Additional Language Access Services – Extra Credit



# AGENCY REPORT CARD



Agency	Office	Lang. Access Coord. 10 PTS	Lang. Access Plan Published 20 PTS	Vital Docs in First 5 Lang. 5 PTS each	Vital Docs in Next 2 Lang. 5 PTS each	Interpret Key Services 5 PTS each	Addit. Lang. Services Extra Credit	Total Score
Office of the Attorney General	Division on Civil Rights	✓	✓	Some, but not all	Some, but not all	Spanish-speaking staff available; language line on request	N/A	65 of 100
	Division of Consumer Affairs	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	N/A	10 of 100
	Division of Criminal Justice	✓	✗	Some Spanish translations available	✗	Language line on request for some services	N/A	20 of 100
Dept. of Human Services	Office of New Americans	✓	✗	Legal Service Referral Forms: Spanish only KYR materials: All Others: Not Yet Translated	KYR Materials only	Spanish only	N/A	25 of 100
	Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services	✗	✗	Some Spanish translations available*	✗	Spanish only	N/A	10 of 100
	Division of Medical Assist. & Health Services	✗	✗	Spanish available; otherwise some docs translated, but not all	Some, but not all	Spanish only	Some NJ FamilyCare docs offered in add'l languages	25 of 100
	Division of Family Dev.	✗	✗	Some Spanish translations available*	✗	Spanish only	✗	10 of 100
Office of the Public Defender		✓	✗	Some, but not all	Some, but not all	Language line on request; some Spanish-speaking staff	N/A	50 of 100

\*Agency utilizes automated machine translation of documents.

Agency	Lang. Access Coord. 10 PTS	Lang. Access Plan 20 PTS	Vital Docs. in Top 5 Lang. 5 PTS each	Vital Docs. in Next 2 Lang. 5 PTS each	Interpret Key Services 5 PTS each	Addit. Lang. Services Extra Credit	Total Score
Dept. of Labor	✓	✗	Some, but not all	✗	Some, but not all	N/A	30 of 100
Dept. of Education	✗	✗	Yes, but only PRISE	Yes, but only PRISE	✗	N/A	10 of 100
Dept. of Children & Families	✓	✗	Translation in progress for 200+ identified vital docs	Translation in progress for 200+ identified vital docs	✓	N/A	55 of 100
Dept. of the Treasury	✗	✗	No*	No*	✗	N/A	0 of 100
Dept. of State	✗	✗	No*	No*	✗	N/A	0 of 100
Dept. of Motor Vehicles	✓	✓	Yes, 2 of 5	✗	✓	Contractual Interpreters	75 of 100
Dept. of Transportation	✓	✗	No*	✗	✓	N/A	15 of 100
Dept. of Environmental Protection	✓	✓	No*	✗	✗	N/A	30 of 100
Dept. of Correction	✗	✗	✗	Victim resources available in Spanish	✗	N/A	5 of 100
Dept. of Agriculture	✗	✗	Some, but not all	Some, but not all	Language line available for some services	N/A	15 of 100
Dept. of Banking & Ins.	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	N/A	0 of 100

\*Agency utilizes automated machine translation of documents.

# VITAL DOCUMENTS SPOTLIGHT

Documents	English	Required as of 1/12/2025					Required by 1/12/2026	
		Spanish	Chinese	Portuguese	Korean	Gujarati	Arabic	Haitian Creole
OEM Alerts	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Tax Relief Applications (ANCHOR, STAY NJ)	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
SNAP Application	✓	✓	Yes, paper only	Yes, paper only	Yes, paper only	Yes, paper only	Yes, paper only	Yes, paper only
Unemployment Insurance Application	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
MVC Drivers' Manual	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
PRISE (Parental Rights in Special Education)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## A Note on Scope and Methodology:

- This is not a comprehensive list of the state agencies required to expand language access. Rather, our coalition and community members focused on a shorter list of key offices and agencies that see high volumes of public interaction. We may expand the universe covered here in future reports.
- Information was compiled by our coalition through email outreach to agencies, phone calls, and website research. We invite agencies who believe their information may be incomplete to reach out to us at [advocacy@aapinewjersey.org](mailto:advocacy@aapinewjersey.org).

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

We recognize that expanding language access across the vast apparatus of New Jersey state government will be a resource-intensive, multi-year endeavor requiring extensive collaboration both within agencies and with external stakeholders. As representatives of the communities who stand to benefit most from this investment, we recommend the following:

- **Invest in Adequate Staffing:** Agencies that have not yet designated a language access coordinator should appoint or hire one without delay. Language access implementation is specialized and time-intensive work, and likely to require additional headcount at any agency that is serious about doing it well. We support increasing the state budget allocation for language access and urge ongoing data collection on the staffing and resources needed for full compliance with the law.
- **Prioritize:** Agencies should identify and prioritize the most urgent needs, including for OEM the timely translation of emergency notifications into the five required languages, situations in which the public engages with the law, and applications for public benefit programs.
- **Review Current Reliance on Machine Translation:** Many state websites and services rely on machine translations such as Google Translate, yet the language access law requires culturally responsive translation. Language access managers should review the quality of machine translation services and issue guidelines on when they may or may not be used.
- **Increase Capacity:** We heard from several agencies that there is a need to expand the pool of state-approved translation and interpretation vendors. With expanded language access now required across state government, there should be an opportunity to leverage the collective buying power to expand options available and lower costs.
- **Share Guidance and Best Practices:** The state of NJ must take an interagency approach to language access implementation, sharing learnings and best practices between agencies. The Office of Innovation may be able to support tech needs and help cross-pollinate certain learnings.

Our next report will be issued in 2026, and we are excited to support and document agencies' progress on expanding language access so that more members of our communities can engage and find the support they need. We invite agencies to stay in touch with us on their progress via [advocacy@aapinewjersey.org](mailto:advocacy@aapinewjersey.org).

## OUR PARTNERS



This report was researched and written in collaboration with the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice, the state's largest immigration coalition. NJAIJ brings together over 60 organizations to fight for policies that empower and protect immigrants. Our special thanks to:



New Jersey Consortium  
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MINKWON CENTER  
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