

Language Access in the District of Columbia

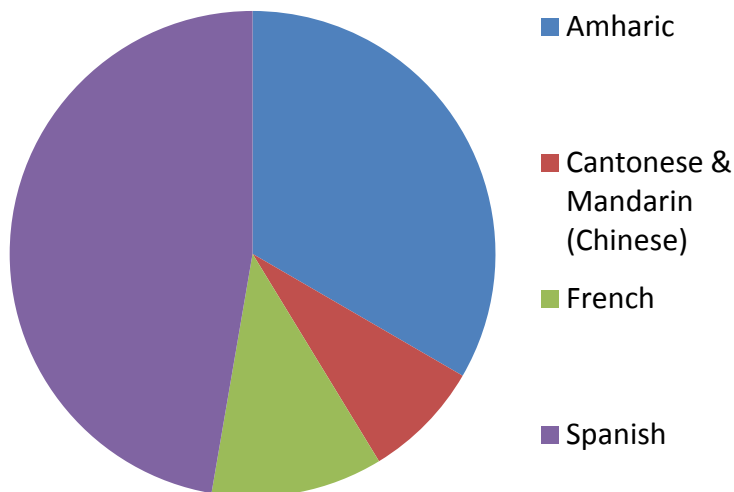
Know your rights to language access!

In 2004, the District of Columbia enacted the D.C. Language Access Act of 2004 (D.C. Code §2-1931 et seq.). District of Columbia government agencies and entities receiving funding from the D.C. government are required to provide access to individuals seeking their services who have limited or no proficiency in English. The agency is mandated to provide oral interpretation to all individuals who wish to take advantage of the agency's services. The agency also must provide written translation of vital documents in the most widely spoken languages.

Community Surveying

The D.C. Language Access Coalition (DCLAC), Many Languages One Voice (MLOV) and the American University- Washington College of Law (AU-WCL) are in the process of surveying Limited English Proficient (LEP) community members to determine how well the DC Language Access Act is actually being implemented by government agencies. The research team has already surveyed more than 200 immigrants in the Washington D.C. area and hopes to interview and survey many more with your help! These surveys will be part of a report that will be released in 2012. We hope that our report will shed light on the good work some of the government agencies are doing as well as bring attention to the language difficulties LEP immigrants continue to face when trying to access government services, schools, hospitals, and other entities in DC.

Figure 1: Languages Surveyed



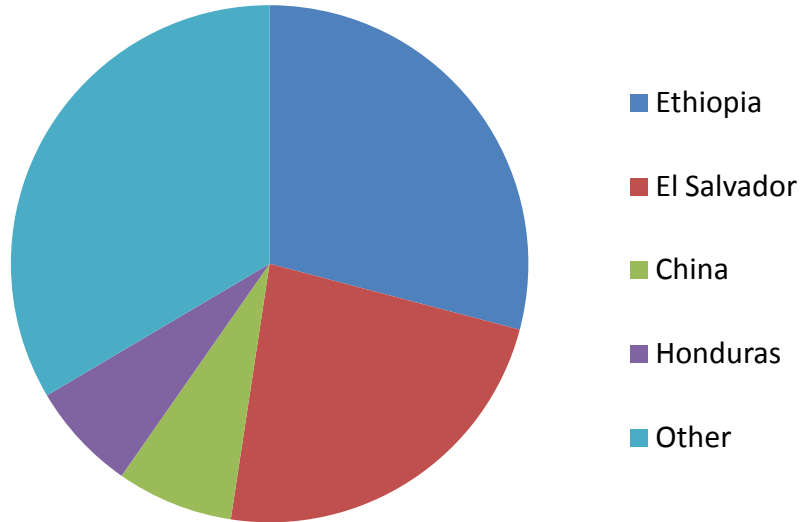
So far, we have surveyed immigrants who speak **Amharic**, **Cantonese**, **French**, **Mandarin** and **Spanish** as their preferred language.

The surveyed immigrants hail from 28 different countries. These countries are Argentina, Algeria, Burma, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Honduras, Hong Kong, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Niger, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, Sudan, and Togo.

While all individuals surveyed were able to communicate in the four surveyed languages, a number of them have native languages which they are more comfortable speaking such as Amharic, Arabic, Bambara, Burmese, Cantonese (Chinese), French, Greek, Guraginya, Mandarin (Chinese), Oromic, Oromiffa, Ouolof, Portuguese, Spanish, Tagalog, and Tigrinya.

Figure 2: Countries with Most Representation

The largest number of immigrants who were surveyed so far were originally from Ethiopia (29.1%), followed by El Salvador (23.3%), China (7.3%), and Honduras (6.8%).



We are always looking to hear from other immigrant populations about their language experiences!

Common language problems encountered by individuals in government agencies

If you feel frustrated when visiting government agencies because you are not able to communicate in your language or receive information in your language, you are not alone!

Our research has confirmed that common complaints of LEP immigrants include:

- Feeling discriminated against because of one’s limited English ability
- The lack of bilingual staff available to assist
- The lack of interpreters or interpretation services
- Long waits for interpreters
- No signs in other languages
- No documents or important information translated into other languages

Get engaged!

MLOV and DCLAC are excited to incorporate your experiences and stories into our 2012 DC Language Access report. If you have encountered any of the above language issues or any other language issues that frustrated you and made you feel unable to adequately communicate with government officials, contact us now and tell us your story!

We are constantly looking for individuals who can speak about their experiences with government agencies, schools, hospitals or other entities in DC! We look forward to working with you to make sure nobody is discriminated from receiving services they need!

Please contact us at:

**Many Languages One Voice
3166 Mount Pleasant St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20010
202-621-0001**

info@mlovd.org