



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge, MA

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Phone: 617-349-4321

To: Cambridge City Council
From: Sumbul Siddiqui, Mayor
Date: March 30, 2021
Subject: Family Policy Council – Language Access

To the Honorable, the School Committee,

As the Chair of the Family Policy Council (FPC), I wanted to update you on work that is being undertaken around language access in Cambridge, which we know is one of the greatest barriers facing many of our families. The Family Policy Council, officially known as the Coordinating Council for Children, Youth and Families, is dedicated to developing policy and program recommendations aimed at ensuring all children, teens, and their families have access to the resources they need to be successful, engaged residents who are prepared for life in our community and in the world.

As you know, the richness of our vibrant community is due to the many residents who immigrated here and chose Cambridge as their home, and whose primary language is not English. The lack of language access can act as a significant barrier to civic participation for many of our residents and can be actively harmful to those who may not know their rights or other critically important information that the City should be providing in multiple languages. Since the Fall of 2020, the Family Policy Council, under the direction of FPC Executive Director Nancy Tauber, has been investigating ways to develop City-wide supports and systems to ensure language justice and provide language access resources to families and providers; and if appropriate, the Council will develop recommendations for implementation.

The Family Policy Council has defined language justice as “the right everyone has to communicate, to understand and to be understood in the language(s) in which they feel most comfortable.”

The Family Policy Council has convened a working group of members to lead the discovery process of their 2020-2021 work plan. The working group has been gathering information, identifying needs, gaps, and best practices, which will be used to shape the action and recommendations of the council. The working group consists of the following members of the FPC and City Staff:



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Working Group Members	
Tina Alu (Co-Chair)	CEOC
Robin Harris (Co-Chair)	Cambridge Public Schools
Nancy Tauber (Co-Chair)	Family Policy Council
Thurya Beek	DHSP's Community Engagement Team
Rabeya Akther	DHSP's Community Engagement Team
Lauren Morse	CPS Family Liaison
Aboma Dirbaba	CPS Family Liaison
Kunjal Shah	CPS Family Liaison
Shayla Simmons	Cambridge Housing Authority
Melissa Peters	Cambridge Community Development Department
Kate Thurman	Commission for Persons with Disabilities
Bridget Martin	Department of Human Services & City Manager's Communications Team
Christine Elow	Cambridge Police Department
Ester Serra Luque	Transition House
CYC	Cambridge Youth Council
Najah Casimir	Traffic, Parking and Traffic Department
David Corbie	CDD's Community Engagement Team
Jose Wendel	Public Health Department, Cambridge Health Alliance
Crystal Rosa	Human Rights, Immigrant Rights & Citizenship, Peace Commission, and Police Review & Advisory Board



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The working group has met 6 times since December and is in the “Discovery Phase,” which includes identifying questions for residents, families, City, school, and community partners, determining how to collect information (surveys, interviews, focus groups), learning from other cities, and understanding demographics to develop recommendations for the Planning Phase. In addition, they have joined the Municipal Language Access Network, which is a great resource for networking, as well as sharing information, solutions to common problems, and best practice standards. Through this connection, they have interviewed Language Access Coordinators from Boston, Massachusetts; Charlotte, North Carolina; Greensboro, North Carolina; Richmond, Virginia; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Seattle, Washington.

We had two presentations at January’s Family Policy Council meeting; the first was from Jodie Stanley, Human Rights Department Outreach and Education Coordinator of the City of Greensboro, North Carolina and the second was from Cliff Cook, Senior Planner Information Manager of the City of Cambridge.

Cliff Cook’s presentation focused on current language access and gaps in Cambridge and is part of the “understanding demographics” charge from the working group. The presentation focused on the demographics of the 36,917 Cambridge residents who speak a language other than English at home. Additionally, there was demographic information on how many of our residents live in a “Linguistically Isolated Household,” which is defined as one where no one 14 years or older speaks English very well. There was also a detailed presentation with a demographic breakdown of residents with a hearing or vision difficulty, by gender, age, race, geography, education, income, employment, and internet access. Having this deep demographic data will help guide the work of the working group as they narrow their focus on identifying urgent language access needs. The full presentation can be found [here](#).

The presentation by Jodie Stanley in Greensboro, NC was part of the “learning from others” charge from the working group. Greensboro, NC developed a language access plan in response to an audit by the Justice Department because they were not in compliance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. They submitted their [plan](#) to the Department of Justice in 2010, and have employed a phased roll-out strategy to address any concerns about budgetary impact. Jodie manages language access for the City, and they have identified a liaison from each department who works with Jodie to coordinate and support language access efforts, and training for multilingual and monolingual employees. Some of their meaningful accomplishments have been as simple as using more infographics, improving customer service, and providing more signage and language identification cards. To address equity issues, they have implemented a Bilingual Pay Incentive program. Greensboro’s goal is to go from compliance to caring, and Jodie provided us with valuable lessons from what they have learned.

At the March 18, 2021 Meeting, we learned more about the work that Boston and Seattle are doing around language access.



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We heard a presentation from Jeniffer Vivar Wong, Interim Director of the Mayor’s Office of Language and Communication Access in the City of Boston, where she explained that their work involves 6 staff from her office, a point person and content expert who serve as liaisons and lead implementation, departments and their staff, and individuals from the Boston community. Their system categories accommodations in three types:

1. Interpretation: the act of listening to a communication in one spoken language and converting it to another spoken language while retaining the same meaning
2. Translation: the replacement of a communication from one language into an equivalent written text in another language
3. Assistive Technology: any item, equipment or product system used to increase, maintain, or improve a person’s functional capability

From Peggy Liao, Language Access Program and Policy Specialist of the City of Seattle, we learned that “language access” is defined as “equitable access for all community members”. The Seattle Language Access Program’s structure shows an interdependence of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, the Language Access Liaison Network, a Partnership with Community Translators, and Mayoral Executive Orders. All City employees are responsible for ensuring language access services in their department—translation, interpretation, etc.—to everyone, no matter what language they speak. In the City of Seattle, language access is a “continual and dynamic process” and offering it in a culturally responsive way is something that can always be further improved.

These informative presentations and learning sessions, as well as the working group discovery process, will help guide our work on the Family Policy Council to develop goals and policies around language access in Cambridge. Please do not hesitate to reach out anytime with questions or concerns about this critical work that is being undertaken by the Family Policy Council and the working group.

Thank you,

Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui