

## **LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) AND LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE PLAN POLICY**

The following policy applies to the Leased Housing Program and the Low Income Public Housing (LIPH) Program:

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) is committed to ensuring equal access to its programs and services by all residents, regardless of primary language spoken. Title VI and Executive Order 13166 require recipients of federal financial assistance to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and services by Limited English Proficient (LEP) persons. Persons who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English can be considered LEP persons.

On January 22, 2007, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued Final Guidance to recipients of HUD funding concerning compliance with the Title VI prohibition against national origin discrimination affecting LEP persons. HUD's Final Guidance defines a four-factor self assessment method which assists agencies receiving HUD funds in determining the extent of their obligations to provide LEP services. Based on the Final Guidance and the Voluntary Compliance Agreement dated September 27, 2007, the CHA completed an LEP self assessment.

Using the LEP self assessment as a guide, the CHA has prepared this Language Assistance Plan (LAP) which defines the actions to be taken by CHA to ensure Title VI compliance with respect to LEP persons. CHA will periodically review and update this LAP in order to ensure continued responsiveness to community needs and compliance with Title VI.

### **II. GOALS OF THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE PLAN**

The goals of CHA's Language Assistance Plan include:

- To ensure meaningful access to CHA's public housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs by all eligible individuals regardless of primary language spoken.
- To ensure that all LEP individuals are made aware that CHA will provide free oral interpretation services to facilitate their contacts with and participation in CHA programs.
- To provide written translations of vital documents to LEP individuals in accordance with HUD's "safe harbor" guidelines".
- To ensure that CHA staff are aware of available language assistance services and how these services need to be used when serving LEP individuals.
- To provide for periodic review and updating of language assistance plans and services in accordance with community needs.

### **III. LEP INDIVIDUALS WHO NEED LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE**

Cambridge is a highly diverse community in which numerous LEP households reside. The Cambridge Department of Community Development estimates that 31.2% of all residents over age 5 speak a language other than English at home. According to Census data, there are at least forty-one (41) languages other than English spoken in Cambridge homes. Table 1 highlights the diversity of languages spoken by persons who are most likely to be served by CHA, i.e. low income persons earning less than 50% of Area Median Income. Note that the most frequently spoken non-English languages by CHA's target population are Spanish, French/Haitian Creole and Portuguese. When the focus is narrowed to existing CHA public housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) participants, the predominant non-English languages are French/Haitian Creole and Spanish.

Table 1-  
 City of Cambridge MA Primary Languages Spoken At Home  
 Persons in Households with Incomes < \$35,000

Language or Language Group	Persons 5 and Older	% Persons 5 and Older	
Total Persons	25,468	100%	Requires Written Translation and Oral Interpretation
Speak only English	16,133	63.3%	
Spanish	2,115	8.3%	
French or Haitian Creole	1,602	6.3%	
Portuguese	1,199	4.7%	
Amharic	463	1.8%	Requires Oral Interpretation Only
Chinese	437	1.7%	
Arabic	420	1.6%	
Korean	315	1.2%	
Japanese	250	1%	
Bengali	242	1%	
Other Language Reported (31) or Not Specified	2,292	8.9%	
<b>Total Persons Speaking a Language other than English at Home</b>	<b>9,335</b>	<b>36.7%</b>	
Source: US Census, Decennial Census			

#### IV. TYPES OF ASSISTANCE NEEDED BY LEP PERSONS

The majority of contacts between CHA and LEP persons are meetings, written communications and phone calls where information is exchanged. Examples include interactions by applicants with CHA Leasing Officers during the application process leading up to housing in public housing or the leased housing program, as well as periodic contacts between residents and CHA Operations staff related to management, maintenance and lease compliance issues. Oral interpretation services may be needed for these contacts.

Other contacts involve the exchange and review of printed materials, some of which may be considered "vital documents". HUD' Final Guidance defines vital documents as, "any document that is critical for ensuring meaningful access to the recipients' major activities and programs by beneficiaries generally and LEP persons specifically". The list of documents considered vital by CHA includes the following for public housing and HCV as applicable:

- Language Identification Form
- Initial and final application(s) for housing
- Appointment notices
- Consent forms
- Lease including lease addenda
- Lease compliance notices including notices to quit
- Termination notices
- Grievance and Conference hearing notices and procedures
- Recertification related forms and notices
- Inspection notices and result
- Rent simplification notices and schedules
- Rent change notices
- Transfer policies and procedures
- Section 8 family obligations

CHA will periodically review and update this list to reflect those documents which are considered vital to applicants and/or residents. With respect to these vital documents, CHA will maintain each in all three "threshold" languages.



## V. LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE TO BE PROVIDED

In order to promote equal access to CHA programs and services by LEP individuals, CHA will implement the following array of language assistance services. Except where noted, all actions will be implemented by March 31, 2009:

### A) Identification of LEP Persons and Notices

Use of "I Speak Cards": In order to help identify LEP individuals and determine the appropriate language assistance, CHA will post and make available I Speak Cards at its central office waiting room and CHA site based management offices. Applicants, public housing residents and HCV participants can use these cards to indicate their primary language. CHA staff at the point of entry will then make appropriate arrangements for interpretation services, generally using either a bi-lingual staff person or a telephone interpretation service.

Notices of Oral Interpretation Services: CHA will provide free access to either bi-lingual staff or telephone interpretation services for all contacts with LEP individuals. CHA will prominently post multi-lingual notices at its central office and CHA site based management offices and on its website which indicate that free oral interpretation services are available upon request.

Language Preferences of Residents and Applicants: CHA will ask applicants and residents, through the use of its language identification form, to identify their primary language at initial application (for new applicants) and at recertification (for existing residents/participants), and to identify their language preference for receiving written communications. The language identification form will also ask the applicant, resident/participant if translations services are necessary. This information will be included in the paper files and in the electronic record (upon implementation of CHA's new computer system slated to be installed beginning in late 2008.)

### B) Language Assistance Measures

- Oral Interpretation - Staff: Where feasible, bi-lingual CHA staff will be deployed to communicate with LEP individuals in their native languages and to assist them in reviewing CHA materials, answering questions about CHA programs, and responding to CHA forms and information requests. Currently, CHA employs staff members who speak Spanish and French/Haitian Creole, and Portuguese which are the non-English languages spoken most frequently by eligible persons served by CHA.
- Oral Interpretation - Telephone Support: CHA will use the services of a professional telephone interpretation service whenever requested by an LEP individual and/or when an LEP person uses an I Speak card to signify that they speak a non-English language and a qualified staff person that speaks the appropriate language is unavailable. When these contacts involve review of CHA forms and procedures, CHA will schedule the call so that the telephone translator has the opportunity to first review the relevant form or procedure. CHA will only utilize interpretation services, which demonstrate a high degree of training and professionalization among the interpreter staff. CHA currently utilizes a service which provides 24/7 coverage, trained and certified interpreters, and coverage for 170 languages. CHA staff will be trained in how to access this service, which will be available as needed for LEP applicants, public housing residents or HCV participants.
- Oral Interpretation - In Person Assistance: In limited instances where telephone interpretation services or the use of bilingual CHA staff are determined insufficient to ensure meaningful access, CHA will provide qualified in-person interpretation services at no cost to the LEP individual either through local Cambridge community organizations or through contracts with qualified and trained interpretations services. Examples of contacts where in person assistance is likely to be required includes termination hearings and evictions. Due to the considerable expense involved in providing in-person assistance, CHA will generally strive to use telephone assistance. If the LEP person does not wish to use the CHA free interpretation services, the LEP person may provide their own qualified interpreters at their own expense; however, see below regarding use of family and friends as interpreters.
- Oral Interpretation - Use of Other Interpreters not provided by CHA: As noted above, LEP individuals will be informed that CHA will provide them with free access to oral interpretation services via bilingual CHA staff or qualified, trained contractors as needed. If the LEP individual requests their own qualified, trained interpreter,



this will be allowed at the individual's own expense. Use of family members and friends, especially minor children, as interpreters will generally be discouraged. Exceptions may be made where the contact with the LEP person is of a routine nature, one that does not involve confidential matters, or significant/complex matters impacting the applicant or resident's housing status, rent payments, or lease compliance issues and the LEP person signs a release that indicates alternative services were offered and waived. Staff will be advised to be alert to the potential for any conflict of interest or competency issues that may arise from the involvement of family or friends. If staff have questions about the appropriateness of allowing family and friends as interpreters, they will consult with CHA's LEP Coordinator for guidance.

- Written Translation: CHA will translate the vital documents listed above into the most frequently used non-English languages: Spanish, French/Haitian Creole, and Portuguese. This process will begin in February 2008 and is scheduled for completion by March 31, 2009.
- Communication with LEP Telephone Callers: CHA will continue to provide English, Spanish, French/Haitian Creole options for its automated waiting list status line. For callers to CHA's office, recognizable languages including Spanish and French/Haitian Creole will be transferred to bi-lingual CHA staff when available. If needed, CHA will attempt to place a three-party call to the oral interpretation telephone service to determine if the service is able to identify the language spoken and provide an interpreter.

#### C) Staff Training and Coordination

CHA will provide training on LEP awareness and required assistance actions under the Language Assistance Plan for employees. This will include:

- Mandatory training: A mandatory training will be scheduled for all employees to review the Language Assistance Plan elements, review new procedures related to the LAP, and to inform staff of their responsibilities relative to LEP persons. On an ongoing basis, periodic refresher training will be provided to staff who regularly interact with CHA clients.
- LEP Coordinator: CHA will designate a staff member as LEP Coordinator, responsible for ongoing updating of the LEP analysis, addressing staff and public questions and issues related to LEP matters, and providing ongoing LEP training.

#### D) Providing Notice to LEP Persons

To ensure that LEP persons are aware of the language services available to them, CHA will take the following actions:

- Post LEP notices in CHA's offices and on website: As described in paragraph V.B. above.
- Partner with community agencies: CHA will contact local community agencies who work with LEP persons to: a) inform them of CHA's policies regarding language services to LEP persons; and, b) solicit their assistance and cooperation in communication CHA's policies and providing assistance to LEP persons.
- Incorporate multi-lingual messages into CHA outreach documents: CHA will utilize standard messages in Spanish, French/Haitian Creole and Portuguese on outreach materials and notices.
- Inform resident associations of language assistance services.

#### E) Monitoring and updating the Language Assistance Plan

Every two years, as part of CHA annual plan process, the LAP will be reviewed and updated, if needed. The review will assess:

- Whether there have been any significant changes in the composition or language needs of the LEP population in Cambridge;
- a review to determine if additional vital documents require translation;



- a review of any issues or problems related to serving LEP persons which may have emerged during the past year; and,
- identification of any recommended actions to provide more responsive and effective language services.
- Since it will be part of the agency's overall annual plan process, the annual LAP review and update process will facilitate public review and comment. CHA will also continue to utilize its annual resident survey to query residents about their LEP needs.

