



# NHCSL

THE NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS

## RESOLUTION No. 2021-09

### **Making State Legislatures More Accessible to America's Diverse Population by Increasing Translation and Interpretation Services in Our State Capitols**

Reported to the Caucus by the NHCSL Government, Social Justice and Taxation  
Task Force  
Del. Alfonso López (VA), Chair

**Sponsored by Rep. Teresa Alonso León (OR)**

Ratified by the Caucus on March 26, 2022

**WHEREAS**, the United States is becoming increasingly diverse and more languages are being spoken throughout the country. Over 8% of the US population speaks English less than “very well,” but even that number can be deceptively low since, it varies by states and can reach almost half of the population of certain counties;<sup>1</sup> and,

**WHEREAS**, political participation and understanding are at the core of democracy; and,

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *People that speak English less than “very well” in the United States* (April 14, 2020). Available at <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/people-that-speak-english-less-than-very-well.html>

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**WHEREAS**, citizens and residents must be afforded the opportunity to directly participate, evaluate or otherwise be involved in the decisions that affect their lives, requiring making democratic processes truly accessible to the public;<sup>2</sup> and,

**WHEREAS**, state legislators have a responsibility to communicate with and effectively represent their constituencies, especially as people's needs continue to shift and change; and,

**WHEREAS**, many states have acted to mitigate language barriers to government information and services in their Executive and Judiciary branches. California mandates language surveys of its statewide and local residents to assess the language access services required and consequential implementation.<sup>3</sup> Hawaii created offices to oversee mandated agency Language Access Plans.<sup>4</sup> New York offers interpretation services as well as translations of vital documents;<sup>5</sup> and,

**WHEREAS**, understanding that legislative language access is equally important, Oregon now funds four Legislature staff members to address language and access issues, including one Spanish Language Interpreter to provide in-house interpretation and translation.<sup>6</sup>

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators calls on state legislatures to adopt language access policies for their legislative work, including interpretation and translation services that allow the legislative process to be accessible to more of the public, including non-English spoken languages and sign language.

THE NATIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS OF STATE LEGISLATORS UNANIMOUSLY RATIFIED THIS RESOLUTION, AS AMENDED, ON MARCH 26, 2022, AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING IN WASHINGTON, DC.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Keugten, *Participatory democracy: The importance of having a say when times are hard* (Institut Montaigne, June 8, 2021). Available at <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/participatory-democracy-importance-having-say-when-times-are-hard>

<sup>3</sup> California Code. CHAPTER 17.5. Use of a Foreign Language in Public Services [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=GOV&division=7.&title=1.&part=&chapter=17.5.&article=](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=GOV&division=7.&title=1.&part=&chapter=17.5.&article=)

<sup>4</sup> Hawaii Department of Health, Office of Language Access (January 2015). <https://health.hawaii.gov/ola/files/2016/12/CHAPTER-321C-January-2015.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Division of Human Rights. (n.d.). *Language Access for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency*. New York State. <https://dhr.ny.gov/language-access>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Administrative Services. (2021, June). <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/246030>