

Conference on Federal Efforts to Increase Accessibility to Limited English Proficient Individuals

The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, along with several other federal agencies, hosted a two-day national conference on providing services to individuals with limited English skills. The conference, the first ever of its kind, provided an opportunity for over 350 representatives from federal, state and local agencies; community organizations; and interpreters and translators from around the country to promote and share ideas to ensure that Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals have meaningful access to programs and activities as required by Executive Order 13166.

The conference was held March 15-16 in Bethesda, Md., and included the participation of several Department officials, including Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. Kim noted the importance of sharing innovative ideas at conferences like this: "Our hope was that attendees would learn additional ways to provide meaningful access to ensure effective emergency response plans, medical services, justice system interactions, or other important services."

A diverse group of field experts conducted sessions on such issues as tips and sources to identify LEP populations, the use of technology to enhance communication, ensuring the quality of interpreters, and cooperative strategies to effectively use resources. Conference attendees were encouraged to network and prepare for future cooperative projects to share resources and expertise.

Many attendees praised the conference as an opportunity for learning and sharing. As attendee Irene Lee from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (a private charitable organization dedicated to the needs of disadvantaged children and families in the U.S.) said, "What you have done these two days will influence people across the country, at every level of government to connect across fields and learn about effective ways to remove language barriers for vulnerable children and families." Deena Jang, from the Center for Law and Social Policy, was also pleased with the opportunities provided by the conference. "The conference provided a great opportunity to network and learn about promising initiatives with federal, state and local government agencies, interpreters and advocates," she said.

In addition to the conference, the Civil Rights Division consistently works to inform government agencies and the public about the provision of meaningful access to LEP individuals – a requirement for recipients of federal funds under federal civil rights laws. Past efforts include:

- Creating a video setting forth civil rights requirements and reasonable steps that can be taken to provide language access. This video, entitled "Breaking Down the Language Barrier: Translating Limited English Proficiency into Practice," was created in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture;

-Collaborating with those same agencies to provide a "Know Your Rights" brochure, http://www.lep.gov/LEP_beneficiary_brochure.pdf, in nine languages in addition to English;

-Creating a Tips and Tools document to assist agencies in implementing language access programs;

-Developing language access planning tools for law enforcement and corrections agencies;

-Circulating a memorandum from Assistant Attorney General Kim to federal agencies, reminding them to consider LEP communities during their short and long-term responses to natural disasters and other emergencies; and

- Providing training to federal, state, and local agencies, as well as community groups.

To find out more about these and other efforts by the Civil Rights Division to ensure that reasonable steps are being taken to assist LEP individuals, please visit <http://www.lep.gov>.

The Civil Rights Division also investigates complaints of discrimination by entities receiving Department of Justice funds (such as law enforcement, corrections, courts, and other justice-related entities). In addition, it serves as a clearinghouse, referring to the appropriate federal agency administrative complaints involving other types of recipients. Complaint forms are available online at www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/complaint.htm.

To request a translation of this announcement in Chinese, Vietnamese or Korean, please contact:

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