



New Frameworks for Language Access

Tracking the Expansion and Features of
State and Local Laws and Policies

By Jacob Hofstetter

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Executive Summary

Limited proficiency in English can create serious barriers for individuals seeking to access government programs, ranging from health care to education, and hinder important communications from government agencies, such as emergency warnings and public safety alerts. To address these issues, many state and local governments have taken steps to provide language access in their services and communications for residents who have limited proficiency in English. Such efforts help governments communicate with an increasingly multilingual U.S. public, enhance public safety and emergency responses, and improve the overall effectiveness of government programs. Providing language access also helps improve equal access to government information and programs, ensuring that an individual's level of proficiency in English does not prevent them from accessing public services for which they are eligible.

To improve the organization and implementation of their efforts to better serve limited English proficient residents, many states and localities have developed cross-agency policies and laws that lay out requirements, standards, and other features to support language access. These policies have grown significantly in number in recent years, with nine states and 31 localities enacting new language access laws or policies since 2020. These laws and policies, which now exist in 13 states, the District of Colombia, and more than 60 localities, generally share certain common features related to agency responsibilities (for example, on the provision of interpretation services and the translation of written materials) and policy administration (such as naming an oversight office). Broadly speaking, these features help ensure fidelity in a policy's implementation by individual agencies and create the mechanisms and infrastructure through which state and local governments can promote the effective administration of these policies on an ongoing basis.

Such efforts help governments communicate with an increasingly multilingual U.S. public, enhance public safety and emergency responses, and improve the overall effectiveness of government programs.

Language access, in addition to being a practical response to community needs, has been a long-standing subject of federal civil rights law. Recipients of federal funding—which include many state and local government agencies—are required by law, court decisions, and regulations stretching back to the 1960s to take steps to ensure that limited proficiency in English does not block eligible individuals from accessing services. An executive order from the Clinton administration, which was in effect until 2025, also created a federal policy framework that brought greater coordination and consistency to language access efforts by federal agencies and in federally funded programs provided by state and local governments and other entities. Federal monitoring, technical assistance, and other related efforts in subsequent years helped fuel the expansion of effective language access practices and policies not only at the national level but by state and local governments as well.

New headwinds in this policy area have emerged since the start of the second Trump term. Executive Order 14224, issued in March 2025, revoked the Clinton-era order on language access, among other actions, and a memorandum subsequently issued by Attorney General Pam Bondi provided additional details for

federal agencies on how to implement this order. Although containing few, if any, details for federally funded programs delivered at the state and local levels, the memorandum did rescind long-standing Justice Department guidance on language access and made it clear that the Trump administration will seek to reduce federal support for language access. In short, even if requirements for recipients of federal funding remain in effect, the federal government may provide little to no monitoring, guidance, or emphasis on language access in its operations and oversight of programs under the Trump administration.

Against the backdrop of these growing cracks in the federal policy framework, state and local efforts to ensure language access have taken on new importance. Many are quite robust and, for the most part, do not rely solely on federal requirements, which have long been fairly loose and only sporadically enforced, regardless of which party has held the presidency. Because most major government programs are delivered to the public by state and local government agencies, rather than the federal government itself, state and local actors also have years of experience with operationalizing language assistance. Consequently, it is difficult to predict the extent to which policy changes at the federal level will affect language access efforts at the state and local levels, particularly if those efforts have been formalized by state and local policies or laws.

This report's mapping of the rapid expansion of state and local policies in recent years can help inform ongoing efforts by policymakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders to establish, formalize, or improve language access measures in their state or locality. As ever, but particularly in light of federal actions in this arena, the development and strengthening of state and local policies can help ensure that language barriers do not impede delivery of critically important public services and information in local communities.

1 Introduction

Approximately 27.7 million individuals living in the United States as of 2023 had limited proficiency in English.¹ The large majority were immigrants, but more than half (53 percent) of Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals were U.S. citizens either by naturalization (9.2 million) or by birth (5.4 million). Ensuring that language barriers alone do not block individuals' ability to access government programs and communications—that is, providing language access—has been a long-standing concern for many state and local governments. Since 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic starkly demonstrated how important it is for governments to be able to communicate effectively with all members of society, efforts to provide language access have also expanded greatly.

¹ Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub, [“State Immigration Data Profiles—United States: Language and Education,”](#) accessed September 29, 2025. Limited English proficiency is measured through responses to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). Respondents are asked to indicate if they speak a language other than English at home. If they respond “yes,” the survey prompts them to report their English proficiency. Those who report speaking English less than “very well” out of the options provided (“very well,” “well,” “not well,” or “not at all”) are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). This report primarily uses the phrase “LEP individuals” or people with “limited proficiency in English,” for two reasons: this aligns with U.S. Census Bureau terminology, and limited proficiency in English is the characteristic that triggers civil rights protections under federal law and regulations. Alternative terms such as people “who speak languages other than English” or “who prefer languages other than English” include some individuals who are both proficient in English and speak another language, who would not be covered by these civil rights protections.

Providing language access is a complex task, requiring the effective integration of language assistance into the wide range of public touchpoints in government programs. Such assistance is primarily delivered via in-person or remote interpreting, the translation of written and online materials, or direct communication with multilingual government employees.² The public touchpoints where language access is needed can include offices and call centers where members of the public interact directly with government staff; websites and online platforms where they access information and services; and announcements, informational documents, and communications via social media posts, broadcast and print media campaigns, and other mediums. Weaving language assistance into these many touchpoints requires extensive behind-the-scenes coordination, planning, monitoring, and other steps, as previous Migration Policy Institute (MPI) research has explored.³

Over the past 25 years, many state and local governments have sought to develop more organized measures to help LEP residents access public services and information. These efforts have come about due to numerous, often interrelated factors, including a growing awareness of the importance of language access, demographic changes that have brought more LEP individuals into communities, increased advocacy from multilingual communities, and practical challenges that state and local agencies have faced in trying to address language access in an ad hoc manner.⁴ State and local efforts have also been spurred by federal civil rights law and regulations that require recipients of federal funding to take steps to ensure that language barriers alone do not block otherwise-eligible individuals from accessing programs—a requirement that, because of the broad reach of federal funds, applies to most state and local government agencies.⁵

In the last five years, this push to formalize language access initiatives has prompted many states and localities to develop laws and policies to better organize, coordinate, standardize, and sustain their efforts.

In the last five years, this push to formalize language access initiatives has prompted many states and localities to develop laws and policies to better organize, coordinate, standardize, and sustain their efforts. This report explores key features of these state and local laws and policies and examines their role in a new national policy context. It builds on prior MPI research, published in 2021,⁶ to highlight the proliferation of language access laws and policies in this latest period. The report begins by

2 Multilingual employees may serve different functions. They may act as interpreters or translators, or they may directly deliver services or information in languages other than English. In addition, in recent years, technology (especially machine translation such as Google Translate) has increasingly been used to provide translation and, in some cases, interpreting. Concerns remain, however, regarding the accuracy and reliability of these technologies.

3 Jacob Hofstetter and Alexis Fintland, *Behind the Scenes: Mapping How State and Local Governments Implement Language Access Measures* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2025).

4 Hofstetter and Fintland, *Behind the Scenes*.

5 For more on the nature and reach of language access requirements for federally supported programs, see Jacob Hofstetter and Margie McHugh, *Expanding Language Access in Federally Supported Programs: Practical Solutions for Persistent Problems* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2024), 5–9. As is discussed in Section 3 of this report, these requirements and the federal government's broader work on language access face an uncertain future under the second Trump administration; it remains to be seen if such measures at the federal level will remain a driving force of state and local efforts, or wane in strength, in the coming years.

6 To read this earlier study, see: Jacob Hofstetter, Margie McHugh, and Anna O'Toole, *A Framework for Language Access: Key Features of U.S. State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2021).

discussing the extent and nature of state and local language access laws and policies across the country, noting changes observed since 2021. It then assesses what the future may hold for these types of laws and policies as well as their important role in supporting language access in light of federal policy changes unfolding under the second Trump administration.

2 The Purpose and Features of State and Local Laws and Policies

State and local language access laws and policies all have the same foundational goal: to ensure that LEP individuals interacting with government programs are able to access public services and information to the same extent as residents who speak English fluently. However, these laws and policies do not exist solely out of a desire for fairness or to comply with federal civil rights requirements. They provide a range of practical benefits for LEP individuals, governments themselves, and communities as a whole.

For LEP individuals, language access helps mitigate the risk of being shut out of government programs for which they are eligible due solely to their level of proficiency in English. Such services—whether connected to education, health care, emergency services, anti-poverty measures, or other programs—are often essential for the well-being and economic mobility of LEP individuals and their families.

From the perspective of government, language access helps improve program effectiveness and impact. Providing language access expands governments' capacity to deliver services to all eligible individuals in their jurisdiction and to communicate with the country's increasingly linguistically diverse public.⁷ As a result of this expanded capacity, government programs and services are better equipped to achieve their goals. For example, a public engagement program aiming to improve the reporting of crimes to law enforcement in a county with a large concentration of Spanish speakers is more likely to succeed if it delivers information and outreach in Spanish as well as English.

This heightened program effectiveness often yields benefits for all members of society—such as those linked to lower poverty rates, educational success for all children in a community, improved public health outcomes, and the many contributions well-integrated immigrants make to local communities and economies. Communities also collectively benefit when all individuals are able to understand and comply with public health and safety announcements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, translated announcements on mask mandates, social-distancing measures, and vaccine availability brought health benefits not only to LEP individuals but also the broader public.

A. Differences in Policy Design and Reach

State and local language access laws and policies vary in their levels of formality as well as their scope. These differences can be the result of a number of factors, such as which stakeholders pushed forward the law or policy and the political context of the jurisdiction in which it was proposed.

⁷ Jeanne Batalova, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," *Migration Information Source*, March 12, 2025.

In terms of their scope, many state and local language access policies address particular sectors (such as health care or education) or individual programs (such as unemployment insurance), laying out requirements or standards for language assistance that apply solely to covered agencies, service providers, or other entities within the defined area. For example, California law requires the state's Employment Development Department to provide expanded interpreting and translation in its unemployment insurance system, while Oregon law mandates the certification of health-care interpreters to ensure they are qualified to accurately convey health-related information to LEP individuals.⁸ Other policies stretch across jurisdictions, covering all public-serving agencies in a particular state or locality. Such policies seek to provide a more standardized, coordinated response to language access across all of the state or local government's programs.

Language access policies also vary in their levels of formality. At the most formalized end of the spectrum are laws, ordinances, and other legislation enacted by state legislatures or local elected bodies (such as city councils or county boards of commissioners). For example, 11 states have formalized language access laws (see Figure 1), and at the local level, many cities have ordinances that address language access, such as long-standing ordinances in New York City and San Francisco.⁹ On the other end of the spectrum are less formalized policies such as North Carolina's Language Access Policy and Statewide Language Access Coordination Plan.¹⁰ Less formalized policies are generally not as binding or permanent as legislation or even executive orders (which generally fall in the middle of the spectrum of formality). At the same time, less formalized policies can be easier to develop, given they are not created through legislative processes. At the local level, these policies often take the form of language access plans, whether for individual agencies or an entire jurisdiction, such as Minneapolis's Language Access Plan.¹¹

This report's analysis focuses on language access laws and policies that both apply across agencies and impose requirements on those agencies (rather than solely offering recommendations or optional best practices). The second of these two criteria can be difficult to define because some policies, particularly at the local level, may not directly describe their features as requirements for agencies. In general, policies are only included in this analysis if they include some type of requirements or standards for covered agencies. Due to policy shifts and uncertainty related to language access requirements in federal programs, policies that were intended solely to comply with federal requirements—especially the now-revoked Executive Order 13166—are generally not included.¹²

8 State of California, "Unemployment Insurance Code," *California Statutes of 2021*, Chapter 78, amended 2021; Oregon Health Authority, "Health Care Interpreter Laws & Policies," accessed September 29, 2025.

9 City of New York, *A Local Law to Amend the New York City Charter and the Administrative Code of the City of New York, in Relation to Improving Access to City Services for Limited English Proficient Individuals*, Local Law No. 30 (2017); City of San Francisco, "Language Access Ordinance," Ordinance No. 116–24, *Administrative Code of the City of San Francisco* (2024).

10 State of North Carolina, *Language Access Policy* (Raleigh: Office of Governor, 2023).

11 City of Minneapolis, *2015 Language Access Plan* (Minneapolis: City of Minneapolis Neighborhood and Community Relations Department, 2015).

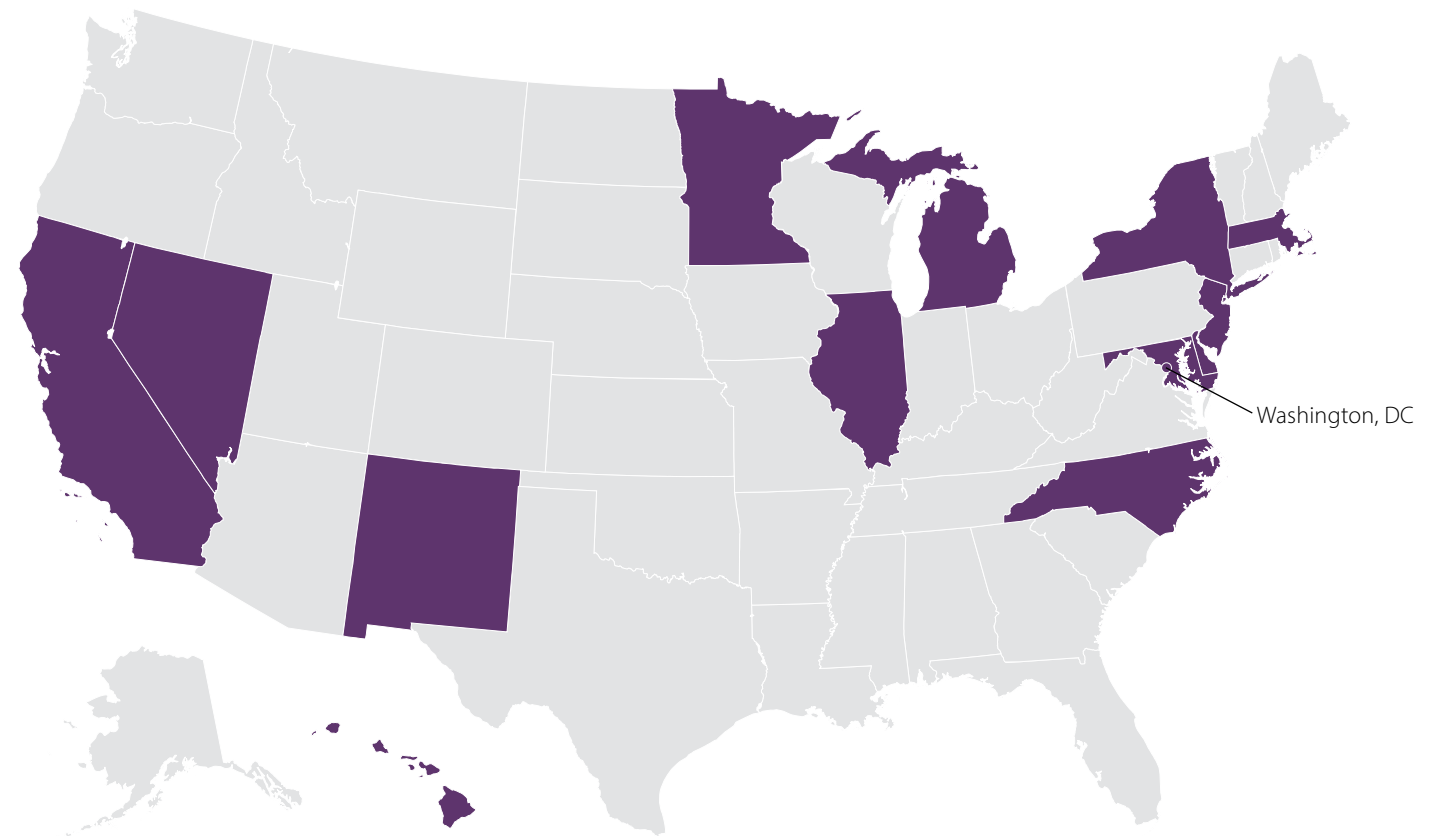
12 It is important to note that Executive Order 13166 did not impose any new or additional requirements on state and local government agencies or other recipients of federal funding. Instead, the order sought to better coordinate the federal government's actions to promote compliance with existing requirements among recipients of federal funding.

Binding, cross-agency state and local language access laws and policies—referred to more simply as state and local language access policies for the remainder of the report—have increased greatly in number since 2020, with nine states and 31 localities having developed new policies since that year. As of November 2025, 13 states as well as the District of Columbia had cross-agency language access policies (see Figure 1). Several of these states updated or developed more formalized policies in recent years. For example, New York State codified pre-existing executive orders on language access into law in 2022, and the governor of Massachusetts issued an executive order in 2023 to strengthen a previous administrative policy.¹³

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FIGURE 1

States with Cross-Agency Language Access Laws or Policies, as of November 2025



Notes: Though not a state, Washington, DC is included in this map as it also has a cross-agency law. Colorado passed a bill in May 2025 that requires the state government to conduct an assessment of language access in state agencies before developing a formalized policy. Once developed, this policy will add Colorado to the list of states with cross-agency laws or policies.

Source: Author mapping of state laws and policies in November 2025. For details on these state measures, as well as local level language access laws and policies, see the appendix of this report.

¹³ State of New York, “Executive Law Section 202-A: Language Translation Services,” *Consolidated Laws of New York*, Chapter 18 (2022); Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Office of the Governor, “Executive Order No. 615: Promoting Access to Government Services and Information by Identifying and Minimizing Language Access Barriers” (executive order, September 13, 2023).

At least 66 localities—primarily cities but also counties and, to a lesser extent, towns—have this type of language access policy in place (see the appendix of this report for a full list). These localities are located in 26 states. Local policies have experienced marked growth in the past five years, with nearly half (44 percent) of the policies in place today having been enacted since 2020.

B. *Notable Policy Features*

State and local language access policies share many similar features. Given these policies aim to accomplish the same goal of providing timely, quality language assistance in government programs, such similarities are natural. These features fit into two primary categories—agency responsibilities and policy administration—described in depth in MPI’s 2021 report on state and local language access policies.¹⁴

Given these policies aim to accomplish the same goal of providing timely, quality language assistance in government programs, such similarities are natural.

Agency responsibilities cover requirements assigned to agencies and government staff to help ensure that language assistance is provided to LEP members of the public, while policy administration refers to larger-scale coordination, technical assistance, monitoring, and other efforts that occur across government, generally managed by a centralized office or staff person, to support the successful

implementation of agency responsibilities. In this way, these two categories broadly correspond to front-of-house and back-of-house responsibilities as they relate to language access in government. Agency responsibilities are front and center, covering how agencies and government staff serve constituents, while policy administration occurs behind the scenes to make those efforts possible.

As laid out in Table 1, many policy features related to agency responsibilities correspond to the actual provision of language assistance via interpreting, translation, and multilingual staff.¹⁵ Relatedly, these features include requirements that aim to ensure the quality and accuracy of language assistance. Finally, this set of agency responsibilities includes two features related to coordination and planning; these requirements (developing a language access plan, designating a language access coordinator) are intended to support and organize agencies’ individual efforts.

¹⁴ Hofstetter, McHugh, and O’Toole, *A Framework for Language Access*.

¹⁵ In some cases, language access laws and policies do not lay out direct requirements for agencies to provide language assistance but instead require them to develop language access plans that lay out how they will provide interpreting, translation, and other forms of language assistance.

TABLE 1

Overview of Features Related to Agency Responsibilities in Language Access Laws and Policies

Feature of Law, Policy, or Ordinance	Description of Common Provisions
Identification of Affected Agencies	Outlines which government agencies will be required to comply with the policy or law. Affected agencies can range from a set of specifically named agencies to those agencies directly serving the public or all agencies within a government. In some cases, policies may assign duties or responsibilities to specific or all government staff rather than agencies.
Translation of Written and Online Materials	Requires agencies or staff to translate written and/or online materials into one or more languages. The materials for which translation is required are typically those considered vital, or those integral to the public's ability to access services or important information. Laws and policies may explicitly state the number of languages or which specific languages the materials must be translated into, depending on the size and characteristics of local LEP populations.
Oral Language Assistance	Requires agencies or staff to provide in-person or remote interpretation services for LEP individuals. Laws and policies may also provide guidance or regulations on the use of bilingual staff, professional interpreters, and volunteers.
Provisions for Accuracy of Services	Requires the provision of accurate interpretation and translation services by, at the most basic level, mandating services be provided by qualified individuals. Other strategies include prohibiting or regulating particular types of language assistance (such as machine translation or the use of family members as interpreters), creating bilingual testing and certification processes, and service quality assessments.
Designation of Language Access Coordinators or Similar Positions	Expands agency capacity by creating designated positions—generally, a language access coordinator—to support and/or oversee policy implementation on an agency level.
Training Staff on Language Access Rights and Procedures	Builds staff knowledge and expertise on how to effectively serve LEP individuals through training on topics such as agency language access responsibilities and cultural and linguistic competency. Some professional development regulations only target senior staff or leadership, while others target agencies' staff more broadly.
Public Notice of Services	Fosters public awareness of language access services offered by an agency through posting signage in public places or on websites and developing outreach initiatives, sometimes in partnership with local community-based organizations.
Language Access/Implementation Plans	Requires agencies to develop language access plans or other documents describing how they will provide meaningful language access and meet the provisions of the law or policy. Many laws and policies require regular updates of these plans.

Source: Author adaptation of the typology from Table 2 in Jacob Hofstetter, Margie McHugh, and Anna O'Toole, *A Framework for Language Access: Key Features of U.S. State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2021). For more examples of state and local policies with features related to agency responsibilities, see Section 4 of that report.

Features in language access laws and policies related to policy administration are shown in Table 2 and cover a more diverse set of requirements. These include designating a single centralized oversight entity, monitoring agency community-engagement efforts, and budgeting for costs related to providing language assistance. Such features help support agencies in providing language access to the public but also aim to make sure that policy requirements and standards are being followed by government staff.

TABLE 2

Overview of Features Related to Policy Administration in Language Access Laws and Policies

Feature of Law, Policy, or Ordinance	Description of Common Provisions
Oversight Office, Entity, or Staff	Charges a particular department, office, entity, or staff person with overseeing agencies' implementation of language access services.
Technical Assistance for Agencies	Supports agencies in implementing language access services by providing technical assistance, advice on implementation, and/or sharing feedback regarding quality of services. Technical assistance is generally provided by an oversight office or staff person, helping to ensure a centralized point of contact for guidance, questions, or concerns from agencies.
Accountability Mechanisms	Helps ensure compliance with language access regulations through monitoring of agencies and, when necessary, corrective action for agencies or staff. Common mechanisms include annual compliance plans, reports to legislatures, and procedures that allow LEP individuals to file complaints that agencies must respond to. Accountability is generally overseen by oversight offices or staff.
Data Systems and Population Tracking	Requires agencies to consider or track different sources of data relevant to language access, often including U.S. Census Bureau data. This allows oversight offices and agencies to monitor changes in the size of LEP populations in their communities in an effort to detect emerging and/or growing language access needs. In some cases, policies direct oversight entities or agencies to track encounters with LEP individuals or the usage of language assistance.
Involvement of Community Members and Groups	Supports community members or community-based organizations in providing their perspectives, feedback, or information on language access needs to oversight entities or agencies. Community perspectives or feedback may be incorporated into language access planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.
Funding for Language Access Measures	Addresses funding considerations related to language access. Laws and policies may require agencies to plan to allocate funding or track expenditures, usually connected to the use of language services contracts for interpreting and translation.

Source: Author adaptation of the typology from Table 3 in Hofstetter, McHugh, and O'Toole, *A Framework for Language Access*. For more examples of state and local policies with features related to policy administration, see Section 5 of that report.

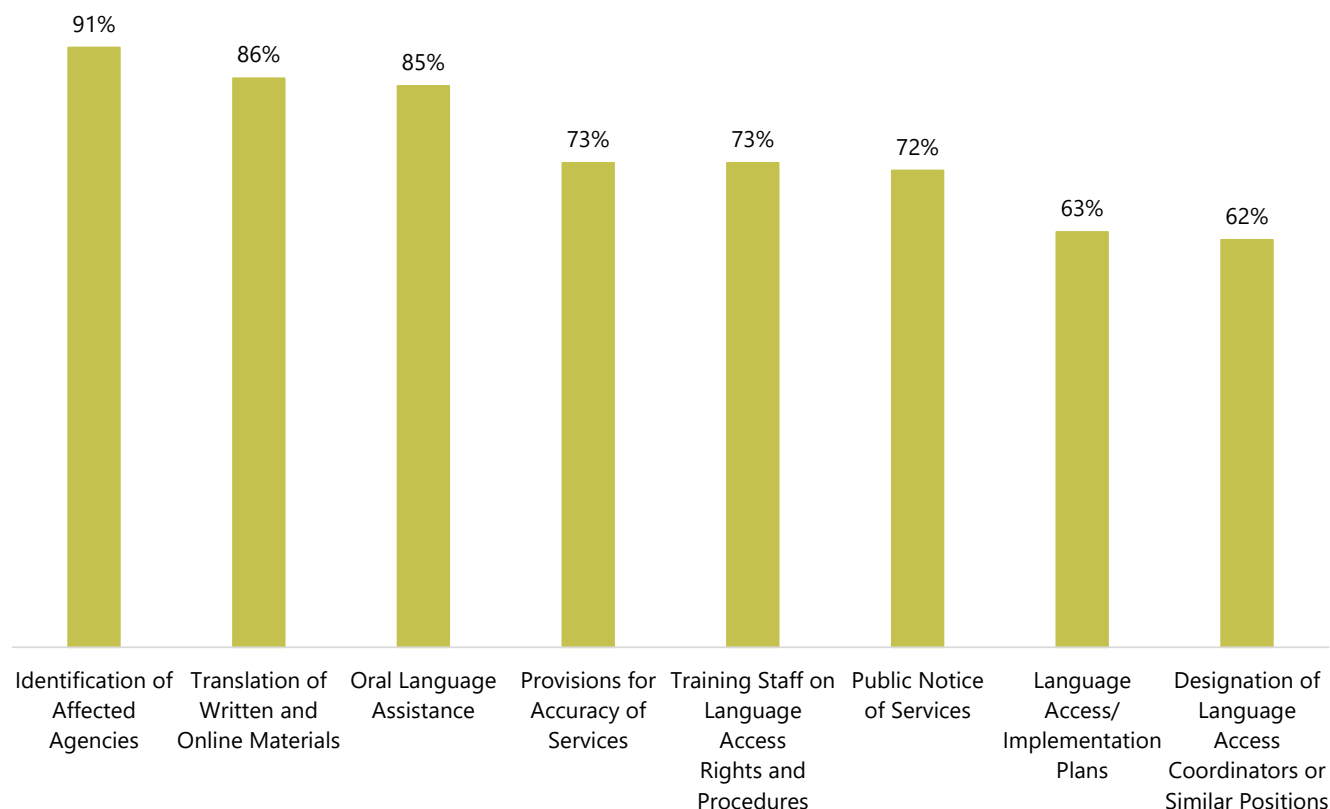
Features related to agency responsibilities are common among state and local laws and policies, as Figure 1 demonstrates. The frequency with which these features appear likely reflects their foundational role in establishing what agencies need to do in order to comply with these laws and policies and, more broadly, to provide meaningful language assistance. These features also align with priority areas of work for government staff involved in implementing language access measures.¹⁶ For example, more than 90 percent of the analyzed policies identify which state or local agencies (or staff members) in a particular jurisdiction are affected by the policies' provisions, a key initial step in policy implementation. Nearly as common—at roughly 85 percent of analyzed policies—are features related to the provision of oral language assistance and features on the translation of written and online materials. Again, the frequency at which these features occur in state and local policies likely reflects their central role in enabling LEP individuals to access government services and communications. Practical tools such as staff training, accuracy standards, and public notice of the availability of language assistance are also common, appearing in more than 70

¹⁶ For a discussion of such policies' implementation, see Hofstetter and Fintland, *Behind the Scenes*.

percent of laws and policies. Relatively less common—but present in just under two-thirds of policies—are requirements related to appointing language access coordinators and to developing language access plans.

FIGURE 2

Frequency of Agency Responsibility Features among State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies Analyzed, November 2025



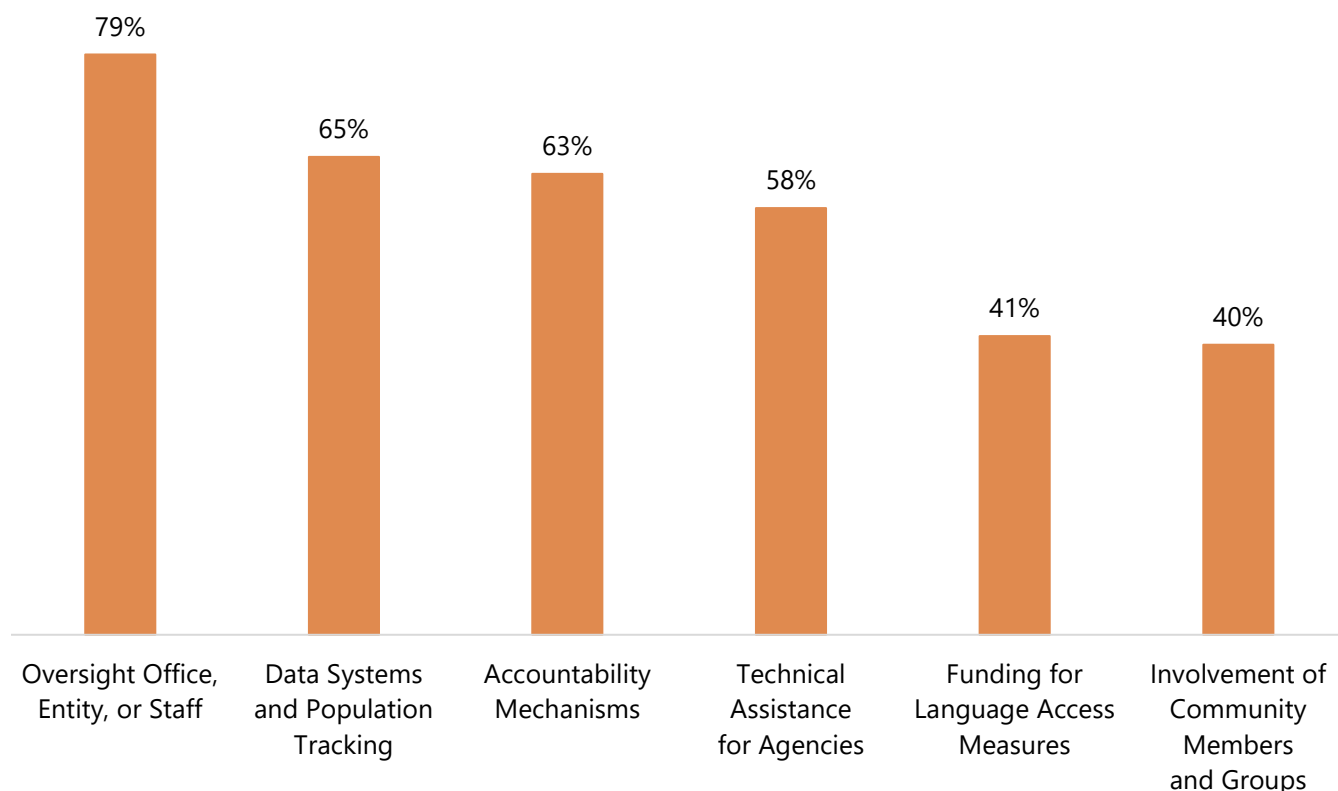
Note: Some jurisdictions have multiple language access laws and policies. In these cases, policies were counted and analyzed separately in order to capture what features each individual policy contains. For example, Michigan has passed two laws that broadly address language access across state agencies; these were counted in this analysis as two policies and their features were analyzed separately.

Source: Author analysis of cross-agency state and local language access laws and policies, November 2025. See the appendix of this report for a list of state and local laws and policies analyzed.

Although important for the implementation and overall sustainability of language access efforts, features related to policy administration are less common than those on agency responsibilities. Still, as can be seen in Figure 3, nearly 80 percent of the analyzed laws and policies designate a cross-agency office, entity, or staff person to provide oversight and coordination for the implementation of the policy or law. Data-related requirements are present in almost two-thirds of the laws and policies, most commonly related to the monitoring of population data such as the number of LEP individuals and/or speakers of languages other than English in a jurisdiction. Provisions on accountability (most commonly complaint systems) and on technical assistance for implementing agencies were the next most prevalent features. Smaller shares of the policies and laws analyzed (approximately 40 percent) include funding-related provisions or require the involvement of community members and groups.

FIGURE 3

Frequency of Policy Administration Features among State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies Analyzed, November 2025



Note: Some jurisdictions have multiple language access laws and policies. In these cases, policies were counted and analyzed separately in order to capture what features each individual policy contains. For example, Michigan has passed two laws that broadly address language access across state agencies; these were counted in this analysis as two policies and their features were analyzed separately. Source: Author analysis of cross-agency state and local language access laws and policies, November 2025. See the appendix of this report for a list of state and local laws and policies analyzed.

3 State and Local Policies in a New Federal Context

In contrast to the growth in the number of language access policies at the state and local levels since 2020, unfolding changes in the federal government's approach to language access since President Donald Trump began his second term have brought new uncertainty and the likelihood of reduced federal support (if not outright opposition) for efforts to provide language access. These actions have destabilized key elements of the policy framework that previously guided language access in federal programs. This has affected both federally conducted programs (i.e., those delivered directly to the public by federal agencies such as the Social Security Administration) as well as federally supported programs (i.e., programs funded or otherwise supported by the federal government but delivered to the public by state and local governments or other entities).

Two primary actions set these changes in motion. First, in March 2025, Trump issued Executive Order 14224, designating English as the official language of the United States and revoking Executive Order 13166, a Clinton-era policy that aimed to better organize and support language access efforts in federal agencies and

programs.¹⁷ Most tangibly, Executive Order 14224 removed the requirement that federal agencies take steps to provide language access in programs they themselves deliver directly to the public.¹⁸

Subsequently, Attorney General Pam Bondi issued a memorandum in July 2025 providing guidance to federal agencies on how to implement the order. In it, she announced that the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) would be rescinding its long-standing guidance on language access and temporarily taking down LEP.gov, the federal government's centralized repository of technical assistance and resources on language access.¹⁹ The memorandum also laid out a series of recommended steps for other federal agencies (including reducing multilingual services and communications, and rescinding DOJ's own guidance documents on language access), while promising the release of further, more detailed guidance in January 2026.²⁰

Executive Order 14224 and the attorney general's memorandum contained few, if any, content elements or guidance related to language access provision by state and local governments implementing federal programs. In its "Legal Framework" section, however, the memorandum indicated that the Trump administration believes that language access protections are much narrower than previously established by court decisions and long-standing executive branch interpretations of Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*.²¹

Still, neither Executive Order 14224 nor other actions to date by the Trump administration have eliminated decades-old requirements that recipients of federal funding take steps to serve eligible LEP individuals. This means that state and local agencies receiving federal funds (as well as other funding recipients such as nonprofit organizations) are still covered by these requirements, which stem primarily from Title VI as well as other federal laws related to language access in specific sectors such as health care.²² The administration has, however, indicated that it will likely be taking few, if any, steps to provide monitoring, enforcement, or technical assistance related to language access in federally funded programs.

Language access laws and policies enacted by states and localities, it should be noted, are also unaffected by the executive order and DOJ guidance.

Language access laws and policies enacted by states and localities, it should be noted, are also unaffected by the executive order and DOJ guidance. Thus, the types of laws and policies analyzed in this report remain in effect and have not been overridden or eliminated by these changes in federal guidance and policy.²³ In some cases, language access laws and policies created specifically and *solely* to

17 The White House, "Executive Order 14224: Designating English as the Official Language of the United States," *Federal Register* 90, no. 43 (March 6, 2025).

18 Jacob Hofstetter, "Shifting Priorities: How the Official English Executive Order Could Affect Language Access Efforts" (short read, MPI, Washington, DC, March 2025).

19 Attorney General Pam Bondi, "Implementation of Executive Order 14,224: Designating English as the Office Language of the United States of America" (memorandum for all federal agencies, Washington, DC, July 14, 2025).

20 Bondi, "Implementation of Executive Order 14,224."

21 Bondi, "Implementation of Executive Order 14,224," 4–6.

22 Joanna E. Cuevas Ingram and Ben D'Avanzo, "Trump Administration's Attempts to Dismantle Language Access Do Not Erase Civil Rights Law," National Immigration Law Center, August 7, 2025; Mara Youdelman and Dylan de Kervor, "Language Access is Mission Critical... and Still the Law," National Health Law Program, August 7, 2025.

23 Hofstetter, "Shifting Priorities."

comply with federal requirements that have been officially revoked (namely, Executive Order 13166) may no longer be valid, depending on the requirements and laws of the jurisdiction. In this new context, states and localities taking steps to improve language access in their programs—whether through formalized laws and policies or other efforts—will also likely find themselves with less guidance and funding than they previously received from the federal government.

4 What Does the Future Hold for State and Local Language Access Efforts?

State and local language access policies have undergone significant development, refinement, and expansion since 2000. Undergirding this rapid expansion has been the long-standing realities of demographic change that have made many U.S. communities more linguistically diverse, as well as greater community advocacy for improved language access in government programs. Over the past five years, state and local efforts on language access have also proliferated due to a variety of other factors, including sudden needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴

Looking ahead, the Trump administration's positioning seems likely to block any advance of new federal efforts to expand language access, and likely to further roll back past work on the issue. These federal changes may also present challenges for some state and local language access efforts. For example, even if existing federal laws and regulations related to language access remain in effect, the downstream effects of reduced attention, guidance, and monitoring of language access in federal programs may result in some state and local government agencies abandoning or reducing supports they currently provide. Funding cuts to programs such as Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, often called food stamps) could also lead to resource constraints for state and local governments that ripple out beyond these particular programs. In the face of budgetary challenges, some states and localities may reduce their investment in language access measures. Federal staffing cuts are also likely to have an impact on state and local language access initiatives, particularly since agency civil rights offices and components of the DOJ that previously were critical sources of technical assistance for those implementing language access measures have been heavily targeted for elimination.²⁵

While federal requirements and associated monitoring and guidance have been important to the development of state and local efforts, they have not been the sole drivers of them.

But while federal requirements and associated monitoring and guidance have been important to the development of state and local efforts, they have not been the sole drivers of them. Furthermore, the nature of federal requirements for language access and the traditional role of state and local governments in complying with them may blunt some of the impact of the administration's actions. Federal language access

²⁴ Hofstetter and Fintland, *Behind the Scenes*.

²⁵ Devlin Barret, "Trump Recasts Mission of Justice Dept's Civil Rights Office, Prompting 'Exodus,'" *New York Times*, April 28, 2025; Erica L. Green "Trump Seeks to Strip Away Legal Tool Key to Civil Rights Enforcement," *New York Times*, May 9, 2025.

mandates have faced challenges that have limited their reach and effectiveness under past administrations as well.²⁶ Over the years, the relatively loose nature of federal language access requirements and limited resources for monitoring and enforcement have meant that state and local government agencies have been largely, if not entirely, responsible for the actual implementation of language assistance in federally funded services. Consequently, it is difficult to predict the extent to which the unfolding federal retreat on language access will lead to similar responses at the state and local levels, though some decline seems inevitable.

The demographic trends and other longer-term factors that have contributed to the growth of state and local language access policies over the past 25 years also remain unchanged; therefore, many state and local governments will likely continue to face pressing practical needs to effectively communicate with their increasingly linguistically diverse communities. As a result, state and local actors will likely have compelling reasons to continue their language access efforts—and perhaps even expand them—despite changes at the federal level. Millions of individuals eligible for government services have limited English proficiency, and state and local government agencies will still need to be able to communicate with all residents regardless of the languages they speak in order to issue emergency alerts, receive reports of crimes, deliver notices from schools, provide public health information, and more.

State and local language access laws and policies will play a key role in achieving these practical, everyday goals. This is due in part to their ability to establish concrete requirements for government agencies and staff, on top of or in addition to those mandated by federal law, but also to their provision of standards, technical assistance, organization, and other supports.²⁷ In addition, formalized policies help reduce the patchwork effect that can arise from agencies, offices, programs, and even individual government staff working on language access independently. Instituting a centralized, standardized approach can reduce such inefficiencies and create new opportunities for learning and innovation across agencies. Finally, formalized policies—particularly laws, ordinances, and other legislation, which often carry more weight and staying power than more informal measures such as language access plans—improve the sustainability of state and local language access efforts, regardless of what may happen on the federal level.

In this new context, state and local efforts to provide language access have taken on heightened importance. Despite facing uncertainty and ongoing changes at the federal level, states and localities can leverage the momentum built over the past 25 years to continue to strengthen the effectiveness of government programs in multilingual communities and to support LEP residents' access to critical services and communications. From seeking opportunities to learn from one another to crafting innovative policy solutions, this represents a critical moment for states and localities to chart their own path in advancing language access for their residents.

State and local language access laws and policies will play a key role in achieving these practical, everyday goals.

²⁶ Hofstetter and McHugh, *Expanding Language Access*.

²⁷ Jacob Hofstetter and Margie McHugh, *Language Access in Colorado State Agencies: Existing Efforts and Opportunities for Expansion* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2024); Hofstetter and Fintland, *Behind the Scenes*.

Appendix. Mapping of State and Local Policies

TABLE A-1

State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies in the United States, as of November 2025

Location	Name of Law or Policy	Year Enacted or Updated with Major Revisions
<i>State Laws and Policies</i>		
California	Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act	1973
Delaware	An Act to Amend Title 29 of the Delaware Code Relating to Improving Communication Assistance for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Disabilities	2024
District of Columbia	Language Access Act	2004
Hawaii	Hawaii Revised Statutes Chapter 321C	2006
Illinois	Language Equity and Access Act	2024
Maryland	Maryland Equal Access to Public Services Act	2003
Massachusetts	Executive Order No. 615: Promoting Access to Government Services and Information by Identifying and Minimizing Language Access Barriers	2023
Michigan	Meaningful Language Access to State Services Act	2023
	Statewide Meaningful Language Access Coordination Act	2023
Minnesota	Minnesota Statutes 15.441: Communications Services	1985
Nevada	Senate Bill 318	2021
New Jersey	An Act Concerning the Requirement for State Government Entities to Provide for the Translation of Certain Documents and Services in Languages Other than English and Supplementing Chapter 14 of Title 52 of the Revised Statutes	2024
New Mexico	House Bill 22	2022
New York State	Executive Order 26: Statewide Language Access Policy	2011
	Executive Law Section 202-A: Language Translation Services	2022
North Carolina	Language Access Policy and Coordination Plan	2024
<i>Local Laws and Policies</i>		
Anchorage, AK	Language Access Policy (P&P No. 16-6)	2018
Phoenix, AZ	Language Access Plan	2024
Tucson, AZ	Administrative Directive 2.05-9: Services for Language Access Policy for Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	2018
Humboldt County, CA	Limited English Proficiency Policy	2020
Long Beach, CA	Resolution 18-0022: A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Long Beach Amending and Reinstating a Language Access Policy	2018
Los Angeles, CA	Executive Directive No. 32: Strengthening Language Access in the City of Los Angeles	2021

TABLE A-1 (cont.)

State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies in the United States, as of November 2025

Location	Name of Law or Policy	Year Enacted or Updated with Major Revisions
Monterey County, CA	Language Access and Effective Communication Policy (Policy P-130)	2018
Monterey Park, CA	Administrative Policy 10-35: Multilingual City Services	2003
Oakland, CA	Equal Access to Services Ordinance	2001
Orange County, CA	Language Access Policy	2020
Palm Springs, CA	Resolution 24713: A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Palm Springs, California, Adopting a Language Access Policy	2020
San Diego County, CA	Language Access (Policy A-139)	2020
San Francisco, CA	Language Access Ordinance (Chapter 91)	2001
San Jose, CA	Language Access Policy and Guidelines	2016
San Mateo County, CA	Language Access Policy – Internal Guidelines	2017
Santa Clara County, CA	Board Resolution BOS-2015-47: Consider Recommendations Relating to Language Access	2015
Sonoma County, CA	Language Access Implementation Plan	2024
Aurora, CO	Language Access Plan (No. 4-27)	2021
Denver, CO	Executive Order 150: Citywide Language Access Program	2022
Boise, ID	Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Language Assistance Plan	2019
Chicago, IL	Citywide Language Access to Ensure the Effective Delivery of City Services	2015
Cook County, IL	Cook County Offices under the President Language Access Policy	2021
Louisville, KY	Louisville Metro Government Language Access Policy (Code of Ordinances § 35.240)	2022
Boston, MA	Establishing Language and Communications Access for City Services (Municipal Code 6-10)	2016
Springfield, MA	Limited English Proficiency Plan	2014
Worcester, MA	Limited English Proficiency Language Access Policy and Procedures	2016
Baltimore, MD	Ordinance 24-440: Baltimore City Government Entities – Language Access	2024
Montgomery County, MD	Executive Order 046-10: Access to County Government Services for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency	2010
Prince George’s County, MD	An Act Concerning Language Access for Public Services	2020
Portland, ME	City of Portland’s Language Access Policy	2018
Detroit, MI	Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan	2017
Minneapolis, MN	2015 Language Access Plan	2015

TABLE A-1 (cont.)

State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies in the United States, as of November 2025

Location	Name of Law or Policy	Year Enacted or Updated with Major Revisions
St. Louis County, MN	Policy to Ensure Access to Services for People with Limited English Language Skills	2002
St. Paul, MN	Limited English Proficiency Plan	2023
Kansas City, MO	Ordinance 240165	2024
Buncombe County, NC	Language Service Policy	2024
Chapel Hill, NC	Language Access Plan	2019
Charlotte, NC	Language Access Policy	2020
Durham, NC	Language Access Plan	2019
New Hanover County, NC	Language Access Plan	2023
Orange County, NC	Orange County Language Access Policy	2020
Winston-Salem, NC	Language Access Plan	2024
Albuquerque, NM	Council Bill No. R-21-231: Language Access Policy	2021
Las Vegas, NV	City of Las Vegas Language Access Plan	2024
Washoe County, NV	Washoe County General Language Accessibility Policy	2024
Monroe County, NY	Monroe County Language Access Plan	N/A
Nassau County, NY	Executive Order 67-2013	2013
	Executive Order 72-2013	2013
New York, NY	Executive Order 120: Citywide Policy on Language Access to Ensure the Effective Delivery of City Services	2008
	Local Law No. 30	2017
Suffolk County, NY	Executive Order 10-2012: Countywide Language Access Policy	2012
	Local Law 16-2018, adopted via Resolution No. 261-2018	2018
Westchester County, NY	Executive Order 1-2019	2019
Lucas County, OH	Lucas County Language Access Plan	2022
Tulsa, OK	Language Access Policy	2022
Lane County, OR	Lane County Limited English Proficiency Plan	2023
Multnomah County, OR	Language, Communication, and Cultural Access Policy	2019
Portland, OR	Resolution No. 37516: Establish and Implement the City's Language Access Policy and Program	2020
Philadelphia, PA	Executive Order 4-01: Access to Federally Funded City Programs and Activities for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency	2001
	Executive Order 7-16: Citywide Policy on Language Access and the Office of Immigrant Affairs	2016
Austin, TX	Administrative Bulletin 22-02: Language Access Policy	2022
Hidalgo County, TX	Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan	2023

TABLE A-1 (cont.)

State and Local Language Access Laws and Policies in the United States, as of November 2025

Location	Name of Law or Policy	Year Enacted or Updated with Major Revisions
Houston, TX	Administrative Policy 2-11: Language Access	2014
Salt Lake City, UT	Salt Lake City Corporation Language Access Administrative Policy (Chapter 31)	2023
Burlington, VT	City of Burlington Language Access Policy	2020
King County, WA	King County Code § 2.15: Immigrant, Refugee, and Language Access Ordinance	2018
Seattle, WA	Executive Order 01-07: Translation and Interpretation Policy	2007
	Executive Order 2017-10: Language Access	2017
Spokane, WA	Language Access Resolution (Res. 2022-0071)	2022
Madison, WI	City of Madison, Wisconsin, Language Access Plan	2018

Notes: For laws and policies that have undergone minor revisions or a series of revisions since their enactment, such as San Francisco's Language Access Ordinance, the link provided is to the most updated version of the policy while the date listed is that of the original enactment. Though not a state, the District of Columbia is included in this table's state listing because its unique position as a federal district is more akin to a state than to a locality within a state.

Source: Author mapping of state laws and policies in November 2025. A version of this table with additional details on each law or policy's features is available on the Migration Policy Institute website and will be updated periodically; see: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/language-access-state-local-expansion>.

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