

Your Language Access Rights in New York State



Office of General Services
Office of Language Access

New York State Language Access Law

New Yorkers speak more than 800 languages. To make sure all New Yorkers can access government services and benefits—no matter how well you communicate in English— Governor Kathy Hochul signed New York State’s language access policy into law and created the state’s Office of Language Access. The Office of Language Access, within the Office of General Services, is responsible for ensuring that New York State agencies covered under this law implement it efficiently and effectively.

Under the law, New York State agencies that provide services or benefits to the public must:

1. Offer interpretation services to the person receiving services or benefits in their primary language, including American Sign Language (ASL).
2. Translate vital documents related to their services or benefits into the top 12 languages spoken by New Yorkers who don’t speak English very well. Agencies may also choose to translate their vital documents into up to four more languages based on criteria detailed in the language access law.
3. Choose a Language Access Coordinator who will work with the Office of Language Access to make sure their agency is following the language access law.
4. Post their Language Access Plan on their agency’s website and update it every two years.

The Office of Language Access publishes a report about these services every year.

Visit [languageaccess.ny.gov](https://www.languageaccess.ny.gov) for more information about the Office of Language Access, the agencies covered under the language access law and to submit feedback about your experience receiving language access services.

There are 2.5 million New Yorkers who don't speak English very well. These are the top twelve languages most commonly spoken in New York, besides English:

- Arabic
- Bengali
- Chinese (including Cantonese and Mandarin)
- French
- Haitian Creole
- Italian
- Korean
- Polish
- Russian
- Spanish
- Urdu
- Yiddish




How to Use Your “I Speak” Card

With this brochure, you should get an “I Speak” card. You can use it to identify your preferred language. You can carry your card with you and show it to staff at any New York State agency covered under the language access law, when requesting their services or benefits. This will help agency staff understand how to get the right interpreter for you. You can also download the card to your phone—just follow the steps below.

Downloading the card to your phone:

1. Scan the QR code.
2. Choose your language from the list.
3. Click on the icon on the top right corner to save it in your phone.
4. Open the card and show it to staff whenever you visit a State agency to get their services or benefits.



A decorative graphic on the left side of the page features a vertical stack of human profiles in various colors: dark blue, light blue, yellow, orange, and red. To the right of these profiles are several speech bubbles in yellow, orange, and light blue, scattered across the page.

Did you know...?

American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary language of many people in the United States and Canada. While ASL is the sign language most commonly signed by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in the United States, it is not universal. There are many varieties of sign language used in different regions, like British Sign Language, French Sign Language or Chinese Sign Language. Sign languages can have a very different structure than spoken languages. Just like anyone who learns English as a second language, ASL users may find it difficult to communicate in English and have the right to an interpreter when seeking services or benefits from New York State agencies covered under the language access law.