

Offered by City Councilors Julia Mejia and Ed Flynn



**CITY OF BOSTON
IN CITY COUNCIL**

**ORDER FOR A HEARING CONCERNING LANGUAGE
ACCESS AND INFORMATION PARITY DURING THE
COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

- WHEREAS,* There are over 140 languages spoken in the City of Boston, and the Boston Planning and Development Agency’s “At a Glance” information sheet states that 111,409 residents speak English “less than very well;” *and*
- WHEREAS,* The first documented case of COVID-19 was reported on February 1, 2020, with the City of Boston launching an informational website on around March 15, 2020 and a multilingual texting service on March 17, 2020; *and*
- WHEREAS,* According to a map published by Leventhal Maps, neighborhoods where the languages spoken at home by at-least 10% of Bostonians 18 years or older include Hyde Park, Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and East Boston, neighborhoods which are also experiencing above average rates of infection of COVID-19; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Residents with limited English proficiency (LEP) have relied heavily on media sources which report information in their languages in addition to city staffers who do speak their language to translate for them in order to get up-to-date information; *and*
- WHEREAS,* Other residents who cannot read or speak English or other languages are struggling to find ways to access information about COVID-19; *and*
- WHEREAS,* The “multilingual help” subsection of the City of Boston’s “Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Boston” website is located at the bottom of an all-English page, and the links to resources on those translated pages are only available in English as of the filing of this hearing order; *and*

WHEREAS, It is important to note that Boston’s COVID-19 website and resources are being updated and translated daily, but the delay in resources being translated can lead to confusion and misinformation; *and*

WHEREAS, Because many of the grant relief opportunities sponsored by the city, state, and federal governments are first-come-first-serve, the delay in translation can result in non-English speakers not being able to get access to important financial resources; *and*

WHEREAS, Access to crucial neighborhood services throughout the city has not only offered financial relief but also a much-needed social connection for residents who are experiencing social isolation and depression; *and*

WHEREAS, That getting information out to people who speak languages other than English is crucial for the health and safety of *all* Bostonians; *and*

WHEREAS, This is an opportunity to uplift the voices of those who have been facing discrimination as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, like our Asian American community, as well as those who have been experiencing higher-than-average rates of infection but have been historically kept out of the process; *NOW THEREFORE BE IT*

ORDERED,

That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council holds a hearing to examine ways to improve language access and parity during the COVID-19 . Representatives from the City of Boston, particularly the Mayor’s Offices of Immigrant Advancement, Office of Economic Development, and Office of Emergency Management, the Boston Public Health Commission, members of the public, particularly those who speak languages other than English, and any other interested parties shall be invited and are encouraged to attend virtually.

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