



**For Immediate Release**

**The Equal Rights Center Releases Report on D.C. Government's  
Failure to Comply with the 2004 D.C. Language Access Act**

WASHINGTON, D.C., October 30, 2007 – An investigation, conducted by the Equal Rights Center (ERC), a non-profit civil rights organization, found that five major D.C. government departments are failing to comply with the 2004 D.C. Language Access Act (LAA).

In January 2007, the ERC began a six-month long investigation, funded by the Public Welfare Foundation, evaluating the extent to which five D.C. government departments – the Department of Human Services, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Department of Employment Services, the Alcoholic Beverages Regulation Administration, and the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs – were in compliance with the LAA.

The ERC conducted two types of tests: on-site tests – performed in person at a government office – and telephone tests. Of the 38 on-site tests conducted in a non-English language, D.C. government entities were in compliance with the LAA only 13.1% of the time; they failed to comply 86.9% of the time. Of the 30 telephone tests conducted in a non-English language, the government agencies were in compliance 67% of the time and failed to comply 33% of the time.

"These failure rates are outrageous!" commented Rabbi Bruce E. Kahn, the Executive Director of the ERC. He continued, "There is no reasonable excuse. By not having the proper translation services available, these five departments are denying thousands of individuals access to essential government services and benefits that they both need and deserve. Mayor Fenty inherited this shameful situation. I hope and pray he will fix it without a moment's delay."

Enacted in 2004 under Mayor Anthony A. Williams, the LAA requires 25 D.C. government entities to provide oral and written translation services in any non-English language spoken by either 3% of the population served, or 500 individuals, whichever is less. The Council of D.C. has identified five such languages: Amharic, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Those were the languages tested by the ERC. According to the LAA, the designated government entities should provide acceptable forms of "oral language services" such as telephone interpreter programs or private interpreter services. Additionally, those entities should provide translations of "vital documents," defined in the LAA as "applications, notices, complaint forms, legal contracts, and outreach materials."

The ERC is collaborating with the D.C. Language Access Coalition, an alliance of 20 community-based organizations, to call upon the government to recognize these failure rates and to improve its compliance with the LAA. The ERC and the Coalition are bringing forth a letter, signed by numerous leading advocacy groups, which presents ten

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Language Access 1.../2



recommendations for the government to adopt. The recommendations include providing increased funding for language access services, holding supervisors accountable for implementing the LAA, and providing annual cultural competency and language access trainings for staff members.

The Coalition will also be attending a Public Oversight Hearing at 2:30pm today at the John A. Wilson Building, regarding the enforcement and effectiveness of the LAA. The Coalition will present their ten recommendations to the Committee on Workforce Development and Government Operations and also submit testimonies from their clients about their experiences attempting to obtain services from various D.C. government entities.

Originally established in 1983 as the Fair Housing Council of Greater Washington, the Equal Rights Center is a private, not-for-profit, civil rights agency that is now a product of mergers with both the Fair Employment Council in 1999 and the Disability Rights Council of Greater Washington on June 30, 2005. It is dedicated to identifying, challenging, and eliminating discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and government services through education, research, testing, counseling, enforcement, and advocacy. To obtain more information about the Equal Rights Center, please go to [www.equalrightscenter.org](http://www.equalrightscenter.org) or call the Equal Rights Center at 202.234.3062.

The D.C. Language Access Coalition is an alliance of 20 community-based organizations advocating for language access rights in the District of Columbia. The Coalition's goal is to ensure that D.C. residents and workers who are limited-English proficient (LEP) or non-English proficient (NEP) can obtain equal access to essential government benefits and services including food stamps, Medicaid, health care, job training programs, and fire and emergency services. The Coalition strives to achieve this goal through education, advocacy, leadership development, training, and outreach.

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Language Access 2.../2