

Complaint Summary Report

Reporting Period: October - December 2025

Complaint #1

SUMMARY OF ALLEGATIONS

The complainant submitted a written request for an administrative hearing in September with the Department of Public Works (DPW), in which the complainant requested Cantonese language services. The Department contacted the complainant about the hearing in October, and the complainant's son mentioned that the invitation to the hearing said, "If you need a translator, please arrange to have one with you." Less than 24 hours before the start of the hearing, a DPW employee reached out to the complainant's son and inquired whether the complainant's son could join to provide translation services. The complainant explained that their son agreed out of concern that no services would be provided but he is not completely proficient in Cantonese.

FINDINGS

OCEIA reached out to the complainant and their son. The latter informed OCEIA that the request for Cantonese language services was submitted to the Department in the written letter requesting a hearing and delivered in person to DPW over a month before the hearing. The complainant's son explained that the request was reiterated twice in early October when they tried to follow up with the Department by phone.

Per the Language Access Ordinance (LAO), section 91.7 (b), City Boards, City Commissions, advisory bodies, and Departments are required to provide language access services in the language the member of the public requests at any public meeting or hearing, if requested at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting or hearing. Furthermore, Sec. 91.14 clarifies that it is the Department's responsibility to provide Language Access Services.

OCEIA brought this issue to the attention of the DPW Language Access Liaison. The Liaison and their manager responded immediately and cooperated with OCEIA to resolve the complaint. The Department committed to the following actions:

- Review all notices, citations, and letters issued to the public in connection with this type of administrative matter to ensure that these materials are compliance with the LAO.
- Ensure that staff involved in scheduling hearings and those communicating directly with members of the public are informed of the LAO and have the tools and guidance needed to provide language assistance.
- Review and update the Department's language access policy and share it across the Department.

- Work with OCEIA to plan and deliver staff training on language access requirements and protocols, specifically targeted at staff whose work involves direct communication with members of the public.

The Department informed OCEIA that they met with the employee involved to go over the complaint and that the matters pertaining to the complainant's hearing had been addressed with the complainant. OCEIA met with the Department liaisons again in December to discuss a high-level training plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Remind all staff of the Department's responsibility to provide Language Access Services in the language a member of the public requests at any public meeting or hearing per SF Administrative Code 91.7.
- Inform LEP Persons who seek services, in their native language, of their right to request Language Access Services (SF Admin. Code 91.14(d)).
- Maintain a departmental language access policy and review it annually per LAO Sec. 91.14 (h). Consider including instructions for staff to contact the Department's roster of bilingual employees and protocols to access City-authorized vendor interpretation services if bilingual staff is not available.
- Provide training and reminders to all staff, including public-facing staff and staff involved in coordinating and scheduling public hearings, on language access requirements and departmental protocols.
 - OCEIA is available to support regarding Department training and technical assistance needs as capacity allows.