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## Housing and Community Development Language Access Policy

### PURPOSE AND INTENT

San Mateo County is linguistically diverse, with nearly half its residents speaking a language other than English at home. Collectively, County residents speak more than 100 different languages from across the world. Other than English, the most prevalent three languages spoken in the County are Spanish, Chinese, and Tagalog. In addition, a portion of County residents are deaf or hard of hearing and may communicate via sign language.

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution in June of 2017 seeking to provide meaningful access to County services, programs, benefits, and information to all County residents, regardless of their English language proficiency. The purpose of this *Language Access Policy (Policy)* is to outline how the Department of Housing's Housing and Community Development (HCD) unit will take affirmative steps to communicate with members of the public with limited English proficiency (LEP) or that are deaf or hard of hearing and to be responsive to the diverse means by which these residents communicate with the County.

### SCOPE

This Policy will focus on HCD's community participation activities including community meetings, public hearings, and surveys designed to solicit community input on federal funding priorities and plans related to housing and community improvement activities. This Policy will focus primarily on providing services in the languages spoken by 5% or more of County residents, which, as of 2023, include Spanish, Chinese, and Tagalog as well as individuals that are deaf or hard of hearing. To determine the level of access needed by these individuals, HCD will balance the following four factors:

1. Number or proportion of LEP and/or deaf or hard of hearing persons likely to be benefit from or be impacted by the results of the activity;
2. Purpose of the activity;
3. Nature and importance of the activity to people's lives; and
4. Resources available to the HCD and associated costs.

Balancing these four factors will ensure meaningful access by LEP and/or deaf or hard of hearing persons to critical services while not imposing undue burdens on the HCD.

## POLICY

This Policy is comprised of two related activities: (1) spoken interpretation and (2) written translation.

### A. Spoken Interpretation

#### *Bilingual Staff:*

- HCD shall create a list or obtain a list from the Human Resources Department of its staff members who are certified by the County as bilingual each year through the Employee Services Agency's certification process. As much as possible, HCD will utilize its own certified bilingual staff members, pursuant to all applicable labor agreements, to provide interpretation services when a bilingual staff member is available and doing so will not disrupt County operations. HCD staff members who are not certified by the County may not perform interpretation services for which they are not certified.
- Bilingual staff are not dedicated interpreters or translators. Thus, County bilingual staff are paid on the normal biweekly basis, not based on their hours of interpretation services. Bilingual staff may also not be trained on conducting simultaneous interpretation services and therefore, professional interpreters may still need to be secured for community participation events, which require simultaneous interpretation.

#### *Simultaneous Interpretation:*

- Upon request, the HCD will make its best effort to provide real-time, simultaneous interpretation services – including the use of American Sign Language - for LEP persons and/or those that are deaf or hard of hearing at community participation events soliciting community input on federal funding priorities and plans related to housing and community improvement activities. Every five-years, the HCD creates a Consolidated Plan, which outlines the needs and priority activities for the next five-years of federal funding. The next five year plan will be for the FY28-32 funding cycle, which will begin in the fall of 2027. Community input is a critical component of this plan. To that end, the HCD hosts a series of community meetings to solicit input on community needs and priorities. Upon request, simultaneous interpretation services will be provided at one, or all, of these events for the primary three languages spoken in the County: Spanish, Chinese, and Tagalog. Over the past two cycles, a Spanish-language meeting and a meeting with simultaneous Chinese interpretation were proactively held by the HCD despite not having received a request for interpretation. The HCD anticipates automatically holding community participation meetings in

at least these two languages in the FY28-32 funding cycle, which will begin in the fall of 2027. Interpretation for deaf and/or hard of hearing persons via American Sign Language will be provided upon request.

- Over time, other meetings may be identified as critical for community input and /or benefit and interpretation services would also be offered for these meetings as needed.

## B. Written Translation

HCD will identify documents that need to be translated and provided in multiple languages based on the importance of the information; the consequence to the LEP and/or deaf or hard of hearing person if the information is not provided accurately; and the urgency of the program or service.

As aforementioned, every five-years, the HCD creates a Consolidated Plan, which outlines the needs and priority activities for the next five-years of federal funding. Community input is a critical component of this plan. To that end, the HCD hosts a series of community meetings ~~and also~~ and conducts a community needs and priorities survey.

The County will provide public notice of the community meetings in English and the primary three languages spoken in the County: Spanish, Chinese and Tagalog. These notices will invite LEP and/or deaf or hard of hearing persons to contact the HCD and request language interpretation for the upcoming meetings.

The needs assessment survey is generally conducted to solicit input from the community on needs and priorities they see in the community. This survey will be translated into the primary three languages spoken in the County: Spanish, Chinese and Tagalog.

Other documents may be identified as critical for translation over time and as needed.