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Public Comment for City Council File 17-0600-S41, Neighborhood Council Translation Services - HENC Committee Meeting - Dec. 11

1 message

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To: david.ryu@lacity.org, gilbert.cedillo@lacity.org, wesson.hj@lacity.org

Cc: Eric.Villanueva@lacity.org

SUBJECT: City Council File 17-0600-S41, Neighborhood Council Translation Services - HENC Committee Meeting - Dec. 11

Dear Honorable City Council Members Ryu, Cedillo, and Wesson,

I am writing as a resident stakeholder of the Historic Cultural North Neighborhood Council (HCNNC), and former board member of the Historic Cultural Neighborhood Council (HCNC), which has had well documented problems related to translation services and funding. **I strongly SUPPORT the proposal to make a separate fund available for neighborhood councils to provide translation services, and would like to encourage the City to allocate an amount greater than the \$60,000 that has been requested by the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (DONE).**

As an English-only speaker who has many neighbors who don't speak English well, or at all, I've encountered the difficulty of relaying basic information to my neighbors due to language barriers. It's one of the reasons why in the past year as a neighborhood council board member, I've volunteered close to 200 hours translating documents, often enlisting the help of relatives and friends to proofread the translations that I painstakingly created using Google Translate. While technology and volunteers can sometimes provide low-cost solutions when there are no other options, there are still situations in which professional translation from human translators is essential, and these services are costly.

I hope that City Council and DONE can provide more funding and support towards lowering the language barriers in our neighborhood councils. We need to reduce the burden that is being carried by certain neighborhood councils, especially those with a large population of recent immigrants. Unfortunately, under the current setup, in which translation is funded from the yearly allocation provided to each neighborhood council, funding for translation is often perceived as coming at the expense of funding for community projects. This has, at times, resulted in tension and resentment between groups that disagree about the importance of translation in regards to outreach and inclusivity. This is truly an equity issue that needs to be addressed at a broader level.

In addition to supporting the proposal by DONE, I would also like to offer five suggestions for improving the delivery of translation services:

1. Transfer responsibility from the individual neighborhood councils to DONE for handling requests for interpreters at neighborhood council board meetings. Professional interpreters, as well equipment that facilitates simultaneous translation (headsets and transmitters), are essential for enabling direct participation of low-English proficiency stakeholders at board meetings, while maintaining the flow of the meetings. Shifting the cost of these services to DONE, and standardizing the process by which translation requests are received and fulfilled, would help to lower the barrier to access to these services.

2. Offer translation of bylaws through this new special fund. Bylaws should be translated by professionals instead of volunteers because they contain legal language that should be carefully worded to avoid misinterpretation, so that all stakeholders understand the rules by which their neighborhood councils operate. But at approximately \$80/page and 25 pages (\$2000), few neighborhood councils are willing to pay for translation of bylaws in one language, let alone the two or more languages that are needed in some neighborhood councils such as HCNNC, which has large numbers of Chinese- and Spanish-only speakers.

3. Develop a library of translated forms and documents that can be shared among neighborhood councils. Establishment of such a library would avoid unnecessary duplication of work and translation costs. Examples of documents that could be translated and shared include speaker cards, sign-in sheets, Monthly Expenditure Reports, and funding applications. The standard language in minutes and agendas could also be translated and shared in various languages.

4. Create an additional fund from which neighborhood councils can request translation of agendas and minutes.

I don't believe that \$60,000 would be enough to provide any and all translation requested by neighborhood councils, so additional funding would probably be needed to provide translation of these important documents.

5. Provide outreach and education to neighborhood councils about translation services, including best practices for making websites accessible in various languages, and for using Google Translate to translate miscellaneous documents.

(Note: Google Translate and other translation software can be a great help, but the quality of the translations depends heavily on the quality of the source material, which needs to be clearly and carefully worded — and that is not always the case on our volunteer boards. Even with clear language, there is still a considerable amount of effort required to correct obvious mistakes or misinterpretations generated by software. For example, “NC” translates to “North Carolina”, and in Chinese, “President” translates into “President of the United States” or “school principal”.)

I believe that doing these five things would go a long way towards lowering language barriers, and encouraging greater stakeholder participation in our neighborhood councils. Please consider increasing the funding for translation services, even beyond the modest amount that has been requested by DONE. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Ling
HCNNC Stakeholder and Resident