

Resolution 22-0137R

WRITTEN

TESTIMONY(S)

RECEIVED

AT THE

FEBRUARY 2, 2023

HEARING

SEE ATTACHED

Mr. President, Honorable Members of the City Council, Staff, and guests. Good Morning!

I am Pat Shannon Jones, Executive Director of the Immigration Outreach Service Center. The IOSC was started in 2000 and conducts educational programs, immigration legal consults, aid to clients and makes many referrals for city services.

The IOSC was started by a church community whose people are from 23 countries. That church today has parishioners from 45 countries. In addition, we as a non-profit have served people from 123 countries. 123!! How many languages do you think we need to speak to our clients? It's not just English and Spanish. I do applaud those who have implemented Spanish in their offices to help provide services to the community, but we also need French, Swahili, Mandarin, Korean, Dari, Pashtu, Arabic, and Ukrainian. To make Baltimore a welcoming city for refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants we must find ways to cross the language divide. It's a winning situation: win-win for us. The city must find translation services and translators for all of our city offices to assist all of our immigrants, so they will choose to stay to help grow our workforces, build vibrant communities and make our city stronger. The time has come for this: Merci, Gracias, Asante, Donyabot, Shukran, TY.



LATINO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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February 2, 2023

Julia Sarmiento
Tenant Service & Eviction Prevention Program Manager
Latino Economic Development Center-LEDC
3500 Boston Street Suite 227
Baltimore, Maryland 21224

Good morning ^{council} members ~~of the~~ ~~committee~~! My name is Julia Sarmiento and I am the Tenant Services and Eviction Prevention Program Manager at the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC)-overseeing the services in Baltimore City. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today and ask for your support on passing bill 22-0137R and talk about the importance of hiring more Spanish speakers at the Baltimore City agencies

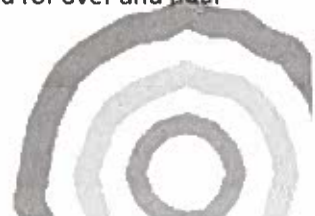
LEDC is a nonprofit organization ^{where our} ~~our~~ mission is to drive the economic and social advancement of low-to-moderate income Latinos and other underserved communities by equipment them with the skills and tools to achieve financial independence and become leaders in their communities.

For the past 30 years, LEDC has provided economic development services in underserved communities-serving over 4,000 individuals a year. I am here today to ask for your support on the above-mentioned bill to help bring more Spanish speaker personnel to the various Baltimore City agencies that work to help low to moderate-income families.

~~Before 2015 LEDC served Maryland residents out of our DC Headquarters.~~ In 2015 LEDC established an office in Baltimore City in response to the increasing need of the Latino community to receive services in their own language. LEDC expanded to Baltimore City to serve an ethnically diverse community with our financial capabilities, rental and homebuying counseling, micro lending and small business technical assistance services. In the Housing Department our work supports low to moderate income families who are trying to prepare themselves to become homeowners or who are trying to avoid being evicted from their homes.

Between 2021 and 2022, LEDC helped over 600 Baltimore City ^{tenants} ~~families~~ of which more than half were of Hispanic origin. The majority of the head of household do not speak English and depend on having their children interpret for them. LEDC has been able to help these families due to our staff being fully bilingual but the work that we do does not provide them with the final answer to their application. On a weekly basis we receive calls from tenants requesting status on their Emergency Rental Assistance Application which we can only provide what is on the portal. In previous months we were informed by Community Action Partnership staff to direct tenants to the City Line. LEDC's staff has tested the number and we have found that when we request to speak to a Spanish speaker, we are put on hold for over and hour

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until the phone call is disconnected. We have heard many of our clients complain about the service when they call the Baltimore City ~~CAP Offices~~.

Government Agencies

We have also heard from landlords who were in the process of obtaining a rental license, their struggles and frustration in the process. They shared with us that they tried to complete the application online, but the process seems confusing, and when they tried to call, they would be put on hold for a long time. It was even more difficult for the Spanish Speaker landlords who also need assistance with translation.

I know this has been a long path for all the CAP offices and the government agencies working to help Baltimore City residents and I want to thank each one of the agencies and members of the MIMA office for all the work and efforts you have done and for allowing LEDC to play a role in those efforts.

We know this work does not end here and as the Latino community continues growing in Baltimore City, we want to be better prepared to help make them feel welcome and that they can call Baltimore City their new home. For this reason, I respectfully urge you to support Bill 22-0137 to help bring more Spanish Speaking staff to all the Baltimore City government agencies to better serve the community. I would like to use this time to suggest more investment in creating job opportunities for bilingual members of the community to provide customer services in other languages such as Spanish.

Thank you, again, for your time and consideration.

Julia Sarmiento
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Phone number:



Qué sigan apoyando a la comunidad bilingüe porque necesitamos traductores en los hospitales en las escuelas ,clínicas donde aplican para sus estampillas de comidas , para renovar los seguros de los niños , dónde sacan las actas de nacimiento y la oficina de socia Security , Y en la nor avenue donde van las personas a pedir ayuda de diferente caso de la escuelas, en las oficinas de policía , bomberos otros lugares porque es difícil no hay bilingües en persona o línea necesitamos los bilingües necesitamos el apoyo de los traductores. |

Good morning. Honorable Chair Stokes and Members of the Education, Workforce, and Youth Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at today's hearing.

Introduction

My name is Joy Scalabrin, and I am a bilingual social worker as well as a community member and neighbor (District 13). I have worked as a bilingual service provider in various capacities in Baltimore City since 2014 - as a volunteer at the Bayview Medical Center, a social work intern with the Newcomer Support Team in Baltimore City Public Schools, and now as a social worker in East Baltimore. I am here today to share what I have learned from my personal/professional experiences on the importance of bilingual staff in City government.

supporting
GMB

Our organization, Hopkins Community Connection is a program that screens patients and families for social needs as a routine part of their medical care appointments. We have specially trained volunteer advocates, Community Health Workers, and Case Managers who navigate families to resources and programs in the community. In our work, we engage with a number of city and state agencies to help families navigate public benefit assistance programs. Our 130 student volunteers, 51 of whom are bilingual, support nearly 4000 families in Baltimore navigate social needs each year, with about 30-40% of those being families where Spanish is the primary language spoken in the household.

MOCFS
DPW
Water & AM

Our program has observed the recent growth of the Spanish-speaking community in Baltimore. Since 2020, we've had to double the number of bilingual staff and volunteers in our program to meet the growing need. In just the past year, we've seen a 4-fold increase in outreach from community members to our program. Our clinic site that primarily serves Spanish speaking families has to regularly close to new referrals as the need for bilingual support to navigate city and community resources far exceeds our program's capacity.

Issues

~~Our program supports a diverse population in Baltimore City. Because of this, we have observed significant differences in ease of access to resources that are attributable to a difference in language. We have found that our English speaking families tend to be more aware of the programs and resources they are eligible for, and in many cases, they have been able to navigate these resources without our assistance. Many of our Spanish speaking families, on the other hand, are not aware of these benefits or that they might be eligible for them. When they do apply for benefits, they tend to encounter more problems with their applications. They miss deadlines, because notices are sent in English rather than Spanish or are unable to dispute problems that arise when seeking assistance.~~

~~Many of the patients and families we work with want to manage their access of programs independently but are unable to follow through because of challenges contacting someone who speaks Spanish on the phone of many agencies. When they call the office, the operator's prompts may be in English, making it difficult to navigate to the right department. Even if the caller is able to indicate that they need a Spanish interpreter, the wait times tend to be much longer, and when the representative answers in English, the caller has difficulty communicating that they need an interpreter. Calls are more likely to~~

barriers
directly
related
to
language
access, and
cultural
understanding

we've
also
seen that

drop as the representative navigates trying to add an interpreter to the call. In many cases, families return to our program and request assistance with making calls, so that our advocates can act as interpreters during these calls.

~~If we are unable to resolve issues over the phone, we encourage families to go to the agency in-person. However, these offices do not regularly have in-person bilingual support.~~ Even if an agency has bilingual staff or access to an interpreter, they may have difficulty getting past the front desk and communicating the goal of their visit. There have been instances where people have been handed a flyer or blank application with more information and turned away at the door once the staff realize that they don't speak English. We have had families call us while visiting these offices, ~~and~~ ^{other} place the call on speaker phone to interpret for agency staff to address the goal of their visit and to ensure that they are not turned away.

Our families also ask us to provide information to them on issues that are out of our scope. We've worked with families to dispute an environmental citation with DPW, ^{educate} access information on home ^{on tenant rig} buying in Baltimore, seeking employment opportunities, and ^{translate} notices they receive in the mail from city agencies. We are regularly contacted by community members who are unaffiliated with our clinics, because they've heard from their neighbors, friends, and family members that our program is a place where they can access help in their language. ^{from all districts}

We are grateful to be able to support our ^{Spanish-speaking neighbors} community, but recognize that acting as on-call, ad hoc interpreters significantly limits our capacity, and the capacity of other ^{community} nonprofit organizations, to support our ^{them} families, and limits ^{the} their autonomy, when our ^{neighbors} clients are capable of navigating these systems on their own and are willing to navigate systems no their own, when adequate bilingual services are made available to them. ^{if we}

Thank you so much for your time.

navigate school enrollment

My name is Angelo Solera, Executive Director of Nuestras Raices Inc, we are a 501 c 3 Hispanic/Latino community based cultural organization in Baltimore city.

We support Councilwoman Odette Ramos hiring Initiative to hire Spanish speakers in front line positions in Baltimore City agencies.

The issue for our community it's not just about language access it's about having representation in city government and its agencies.

Representation matters because if we're not present, we are an afterthought, **we are invisible.**

Without representation our Latino community does not get the same services, benefits, and opportunities most Baltimoreans get.

According to the US Census the Hispanic/Latino population in Baltimore city grow from **4% in 2010 to 8% in 2020, or from 25,960 to 45,927.** however, we have almost no representation in city government and its agencies.

Thousands of Latinos go to work every day, pay taxes, contribute to the economy and vote in Baltimore city, however we have almost no representation in city government and its agencies.

For example, Latino students represent a total of 13% of the total student body population in the BCPSS. However, Latino teachers represent less than 1 % of all the teachers in the BCPSS.

Due to the lack of Latino teachers, thousands of US born Latino students in Baltimore city go to school every day and never get to see a Latino teacher.

Baltimore city government and its agencies needs to be more inclusive and diverse to ensure all Baltimoreans including Latinos get the same services, benefits, and opportunities as they are entitled by law.

Rocio Masset

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February 1, 2023

In 2020 The Covid 19 pandemic erupted and everything entered a state of emergency. In this state of emergency, everyone, organizations and government, were exceeded in their capacity. And this is where the City demonstrated its interest in directly supporting its limited English communities.

I will speak in particular of the Eviction Prevention Program in which I participate. The statistics of the first months in which funds began to be disbursed for housing stability showed that less than 0.5% of applicants for this program were residents whose language was other than English, that is, whose limited English proficiency residents it. Given this, and thanks to the efforts of MIMA, I emphasize, thanks to the efforts of MIMA, the city assigned grants to different non-profit organizations in order to access limited English proficiency residents. The intention was for non-profit organizations to urgently provide services that our government has the obligation to provide its residents

Non-profit organizations such as SECDC, LEDC and CASA, managed to provide access to hundreds of limited English families. The vast majority Spanish-speaking, but we also managed to reach the community that speaks Mandarin, Korean and Urdu, this through the use of translator telephone lines.

The work of the non-profit organizations meant an economic spill of more than \$1,500,000, funds that, without a doubt, would not have been distributed due to the lack of access to languages other than English by government agencies.

Without MIMA's efforts to access resources for limited English proficient residents THIS would NOT have been achieved.

However, there is still much to do. Now that we have verified that by breaking down the language barrier, our communities can access services, it is my wish that there be a SYSTEMATIC CHANGE in which, from the same government agencies, and not from non-profit organizations, our communities have access to government programs and services in their own languages .

I appreciate the efforts of the Mayor and MIMA. Since the pandemic and until today, they have shown their desire to support us. Thank you, we are on the right track. Let's keep working

Here the question is, how can we, as residents of this city, support this change, because we want to be part of this change.

BILINGUAL:

Testimonio de Macrina Galvez

Hola., soy Macrina. Estoy aquí porque siempre he tenido muchos problemas en oficinas de gobierno porque no tienen gente que hable español. Para las estampillas de comida he ido por muchos años a la oficina, cada vez que voy duro todo el día sentada sin nadie que me atienda ni que me explique nada. Y no soy solo yo, somos muchas familias que pasamos ahí sentadas todo el día sin que nadie nos atiende porque nadie habla inglés, nuestros niños necesitan ayuda. Es lo mismo en la oficina de Broadway street, muchas familias pasamos ahí sentadas todo el día. Yo tengo un problema en mi caso que no me han resuelto en muchos años porque no tengo quien hable español. Y mire, ellos saben que mi caso está en español y me mandan cartas en inglés. Me perdí de una ayuda de emergencia quedaron porque me mandan los papeles en inglés. Por favor les pido que contraten gente en español. Y también quiero decirle que me siento muy contenta cuando en oficinas hablan español. Tuve ayuda para la renta gracias a que tenían gente en español atendiendo nos en oficina que no eran del gobierno.

Macrina

Macrina Galvez's Testimony

Hi, my name is Macrina. I am here because I've had a lot of problems in city offices because they don't have someone who speaks Spanish. For food stamps, I've gone for many years to the office, and every time I sit and wait long days without anyone attending me or explaining anything to me. And it's not only me going through this, but also other families as well who sit there all day without anyone attending them simply because we don't speak English. Our kids need help. It is the same in the office on Broadway Street, many families spend their time there all day. I have a problem, where my case has not been resolved for many years because they don't have anyone who speaks Spanish. And look, they know my case is in Spanish and they send me letter in English. I lost my chance to receive some emergency help because they sent me letters in English. Please, I ask you to hire more people that speak Spanish. It feels so good when I go to an office, and someone there speaks my language. I received rental assistance once because they had Spanish speaking employees, and they helped me, but it wasn't a city office.

Macrina