



Odette Ramos

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Testimony

February 2, 2023

22-0137R – Informational Hearing – Hiring Initiatives - Spanish Speakers

City Council hearing to discuss hiring Spanish speaking frontline workers in City Government

Honorable Chair Stokes and Distinguished Members of the Education, Workforce, and Youth Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to hear 22-0137R – Informational Hearing – Hiring Initiatives – Spanish Speakers. This is an important hearing to understand where the City is in ensuring that all residents are connected to our government, are able to participate in public meetings, and are able to access the services that they deserve and are paying taxes to receive.

Baltimore City has already implemented Language Line, a service used when a speaker of another language needs to communicate with one of our staff who does not know that language. They can call a number and be connected with a translator immediately. While accessing Language Line is one of the ways to ensure our community is able to access services, hiring members of our community is essential.

According to the most recent census, the Hispanic/Latino community in Baltimore City has grown almost 80% in 10 years rising from 25,960 residents to 45,927 residents, and it is widely believed this is an undercount. Our community is no longer concentrated in SE Baltimore. We are living, working, playing, and going to school across the City.

Some of our agencies have been exceptional in seeing a need in our community, and hiring accordingly. The Department of Health is one agency who hired community health workers during the pandemic and has kept them on. I have seen some improvement in additional agencies, and look forward to the testimony from those agencies, however there is still work to do, as we know from our budget hearings, that there was at that time one person in 911 dispatch that spoke Spanish.

Our community is disconnected from government for many reasons. The biggest indicator of this is that Baltimore City 311 system received 660,000 calls between January 2020 and December 2021, and only 2,000 of those calls used the Spanish language line, which is .03% of the calls. We know our community members want to connect with government and want to learn how, we have to help them feel welcome to do so.

It's not enough to say that Baltimore City is a welcoming city if the people who serve us don't look like us or can't speak our language. Our community is the fastest growing community in the city, and Spanish is the 2nd most spoken language. We want to make sure our Spanish speaking neighbors are aware of the city services they should benefit from just like any other resident of our City. We also want to be sure our

community can participate in government, just like anyone else can. It's about building trust between our city government and the community.

In preparing for this hearing, we have asked for dual translation services, and discovered that dual translation services have not been provided in most public meetings. And City Council was not even ready to provide dual translation services – until this hearing. Thanks to Hosea and the Council President's office, we have translators for the hearing. One translator is translating from English to Spanish over the phones, and one will translate from Spanish to English when it's time for public testimony. This was a lesson learned for a lot of us, and in the new fiscal year, more agencies and the Council will be prepared.

This is one of the steps in the process for being ready for our growing populations, and I look forward to the hearing.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions. I can be reached on 410-396-4814 or via email at odette.ramos@baltimorecity.gov.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Odette", written in a cursive style.

Odette Ramos
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