



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Commission on Aging

Recommendation Number: 20240312-009: Translation and Interpretation Services for Boards and Commissions

WHEREAS, *Imagine Austin* is a 30-year plan that maps out a vision of Austin as a beacon of sustainability, social equity, and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its citizens; and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all¹; and

WHEREAS, a City of Austin report identified that many non-English-speaking residents abstain from engaging in the community due to language barriers and the associated challenges with communicating²; and

WHEREAS, a recent audit found the city is not adequately meeting the goals of the policy, established in 2014 to provide translation and interpretation services, intended to give people equitable access to programs and information, leaving people to try to navigate these systems alone³; and

WHEREAS, according to City data at iSpeak Austin, 31% of Austinites speak a language other than English at home and 11.4% of Austinites speak English “less than very well”⁴; and

WHEREAS, a recent experience by the Commission on Immigrant Affairs, while working to get live interpretation for a commissioner, highlighted concerns about the current funding practice(s) of language accessibility for Boards and Commissions to get these services in a timely fashion, as well as the support process for Commissioners with Limited English Proficiency who require live interpretation services during the application process, onboarding, training, and meetings; and

WHEREAS, both the work of the Commission on Immigrant Affairs and the Asian American Quality of Life Advisory Commission were both recently impacted, attempting to obtain these services for active commissioners. Even after services were initially provided, there were inconsistencies in the provision of these services; and

WHEREAS, although the City of Austin’s language access program complies with Executive Order 13166 and other relevant regulations, City staff informed the Commission on Immigrant Affairs Chair that the

¹ [City Embarks on Community-Wide Effort to Update Imagine Austin | AustinTexas.gov](https://www.austintexas.gov/department/city-embarks-on-community-wide-effort-to-update-imagine-austin)

² <https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/pio/document.cfm?id=367457>

³ [Austin is not doing enough to communicate with non-English speakers, audit finds | KUT Radio, Austin's NPR Station](https://www.kutradio.com/news/austin-is-not-doing-enough-to-communicate-with-non-english-speakers-audit-finds/)

⁴ [iSpeak Austin | AustinTexas.gov](https://www.austintexas.gov/department/ispeak-austin)

⁵ <https://www.austintexas.gov/page/language-access-policy>

Administrative Bulletin on Language Access does not apply to Boards and Commissions, which appears to be inconsistent under "Applicability,"

- "This administrative bulletin shall apply to all City of Austin departments, contractors, affiliates, and volunteers providing direct services, indirect services, and information to the public on behalf of the City."⁵;and


WHEREAS, Austinites with limited English proficiency are being hindered from effectively serving on Commissions, which does not align with social equity vision put forth in *Imagine Austin*;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission on Aging urges the Austin City Council to direct the City to establish a standardized process across all departments for providing interpretation and translation services for all City of Austin Boards and Commissions and make any necessary revisions to the City's Language Access Bulletin.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Commission on Aging requests the inclusion of language access services as an option in the application process for new commissioners and offer that application in the same languages as identified by the City of Austin Planning Department as having more than 1,000 speakers of a specific language residing in Austin.

Date of Approval: March 12, 2025.

Record of the vote: 11 to 0. Motioned by Commissioner Flatau, Seconded by Commissioner Fred Lugo.

Attest: 

(Chair)