



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Commission on Immigrant Affairs

Recommendation Number: 2025030314: 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, The Commission on Immigrant Affairs (CoIA) most recent experience highlighted concerns about the current funding practice for language accessibility for Boards and Commissions, as well as the support process for Commissioners with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) who required live interpretation services during onboarding, training, and meetings; and

WHEREAS, The CoIA had delays in the onboarding and training of an LEP Commissioner, while these services were ultimately provided, there was some confusion among regarding which department or office was responsible for delivering the translation and interpretation services, resulting in delays in fulfilling the request; and

WHEREAS, the current funding practice for covering translation and interpretation services for Boards and Commissions was identified not sustainable. No department supporting Boards and Commissions allocates

¹ [City Embarks on Community-Wide Effort to Update Imagine Austin | AustinTexas.gov](https://www.austintexas.gov/updates/2022/03/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/updates/2022/03/ispeak-austin)

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

specific funds in the fiscal budget for these interpretation and translation services for Commissioners who need them; and

WHEREAS, without a proactive funding system, resources are often diverted from other essential services and programs when a need arises. A sustainable funding plan is necessary; and

WHEREAS, The Commission on Immigrant Affairs (CoIA) additionally encountered inconsistencies in the support process of an LEP Commissioner, particularly regarding IT's role in hybrid meetings. While IT is traditionally responsible for setting up hybrid meetings, including creating Webex links, they ceased providing setup support when interpretation services were required. The change lacked clarity, especially given that IT had previously supported the CoIA and other Commissions without issue. Notably, IT's setup support to CoIA resumed after the departure of the Commissioner who required interpretation services; and

WHEREAS, the lack of a standardized process resulted in confusion and delays, highlighting the need for a uniform approach to language access across all City departments supporting Commissions; and

WHEREAS, Although the City of Austin's language access program complies with Executive Order 13166 and other relevant regulations, City staff informed the CoIA Chair that the Administrative Bulletin on Language Access does not apply to Boards and Commissions, which appears to be inconsistent under "Applicability," and

WHEREAS, the bulletin states: *"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, we need to establish a consistent language access policy to promote inclusivity for Boards and Commissions, ensuring equitable support for all Commissioners in future meetings; 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 Immigrant Affairs urges the Austin City Council to direct the City to establish a standardized process across all departments for providing translation/interpretation services to Commissioners. THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Commission recommends that these services be incorporated into the City's Language Access Bulletin to ensure equitable accessibility for both current and future Commissioners. The Commission requests for the inclusion of language access services as an option in the application process for new Commissioners and the adoption of a proactive funding approach to specifically support these essential services.

Date of Approval: 3/3/2025

Record of the vote: Unanimous at (7-0) vote

Motioned by: Azeem Edwin

Seconded by: Miriam Dorantes

Commissioners Present: Melissa Ortega, Chair
Miriam Dorantes, Vice Chair
Adrian De La Rosa
Azeem Edwin
Aditi Joshi
Jeanne Canan Kaba
Yohana Saucedo

Attest: _____ Gunjen Mittal _____
(Staff or board member can sign)