

Language Services for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Individuals at Social Security Offices

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is committed to providing fair and equitable World Class Service, regardless of an individual's inability to communicate effectively in English.¹

Language Services are Available to LEP Individuals at All SSA Offices (District and ODAR)

- 1) SSA provides free interpreters to any individual requesting language assistance or when such assistance is necessary to ensure that the individual is not disadvantaged.
- 2) Individuals that need language assistance will not be required to provide their own interpreters.
- 3) If an individual prefers to use his/her own interpreter, such as a family member, friend, or third party, SSA must first determine whether the interpreter meets SSA's competency requirements.
- 4) Generally, SSA will not permit a child under age 18 to serve as an interpreter.
- 5) SSA staff must provide either qualified office interpreters or interpreters available through a national contract to Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS).
- 6) Staff must provide available written program materials in the language the individual prefers.²

The SSA District Office

District office staff must provide appropriate language services to all LEP individuals. For each interaction (on the phone, written communication, in-person) staff must:

- 1) Be alert to the language needs of any individual having difficulty in understanding or speaking English and be sensitive to the cultural differences that could affect an in-person interview.
- 2) Determine whether an individual wishes to conduct the interview in English and, if not, which language other than English s/he prefers to use, and:
 - a. Offer to obtain the services of an in-office interpreter prior to an interview
 - b. Offer to obtain an interpreter through the TIS if the future appointment is a telephone interview, or immediate service will be provided
- 3) Provide an interpreter whenever it is difficult to understand the individual, or when it is evident language assistance is needed to ensure the individual is not disadvantaged, even if the individual does not request an interpreter.
- 4) Use the following tools when they do not know the language for which assistance is required:
 - a. For in-office interviews- using the interpreter poster and "I Speak" language cards, or
 - b. Contact the Telephone interpreter services (TIS), which employs trained operators who that can determine the language for which assistance is needed
- 5) For information inquiries, staff must provide available written materials, (pamphlets, fact sheets, etc.) in the language the individual prefers.
- 6) Assure the individual that SSA will provide him/her with service equal to that provided to individuals who speak English well.
- 7) Inform him/her that SSA will provide interpreter services free of charge.³

Filing a Complaint with SSA

SSA has a complaint process for LEP individuals that were not provided language services or treated unfairly by district office staff or a hearing officer.⁴ It is recommended that an individual submits a written complaint detailing the unfair treatment and any witnesses that were present. District office complaints should be sent to the district office manager.

¹ See SSA LEP Policy, Available at <http://www.ssa.gov/multilanguage/LEPPlan2.htm>; See also POMS GN 00203.011, Special Interviewing Situations, and Available at: <https://s044a90.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lrx/0200203011>.

² Id.

³ See POMS GN 00203.011.

⁴ SSA Publication No. 05-10071, February 2004, Available at: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10071.html> (Spanish/English).