

# The Public Utilities Commission of Nevada Language Access Plan



## I. Purpose and Authority -

Nevada's Senate Bill 318 (SB318) and the federal guidance on Title VI both agree that language should not be a barrier to accessing governmental programs and services. As SB318 puts it, "Persons with limited English proficiency require and deserve meaningful, timely access to government services in their preferred language." Moreover, it makes it clear that it is the responsibility of government to provide that access:

State and local agencies and entities that receive public money have an obligation to provide meaningful, timely access for persons with limited English proficiency to the programs and services of those agencies and entities.

The Public Utilities Commission ("PUCN") is committed to compliance with Nevada Senate Bill 318 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 2 C.S. § 561 et seq. (Act 172 of 2006) in ensuring meaningful access to State services and programs for individuals with limited English proficiency.

The purpose of this document is to establish an effective plan and protocol for the PUCN personnel to follow when providing services to, or interacting with, individuals who have limited English proficiency. Following this plan and protocol is essential to the success of our mission to serve to protect the public interest, ensure fair and reasonable utility rates, and regulate the delivery of utility services to benefit the economy, the environment, and all Nevadans.

## II. General Policy -

The PUCN recognizes that the population eligible to receive its services includes limited English proficient ("LEP") individuals. It is the policy of the PUCN to ensure meaningful access to LEP individuals. The PUCN adopts the following policies and procedures to ensure that LEP individuals can gain equal access to the PUCN's services and communicate effectively. This Plan applies to all PUCN's programs and services including, but not limited to:

It is Nevada's policy to grant access to services or programs to every person regardless of their ability to speak, understand, read, or write English. The PUCN intends to take all reasonable steps to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to its services and programs. The PUCN seeks to reduce barriers by increasing its capacity to deliver services and benefits to people in their preferred languages.

Toward this end, The PUCN endorses the following policies:

- The PUCN is committed to equity and will take all reasonable steps to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to all its services, programs, and activities.
- The agency, rather than the LEP individual, bears the responsibility for providing appropriate language services, regardless of the LEP individual's preferred language, at no cost to the LEP individual.
- Staff at the initial points of contact have the specific duty to identify and record language needs.
- Use of informal interpreters such as family, friends of the person seeking service, or other customers is not allowed. Minor children are prohibited from acting as interpreters.
- No staff may suggest or require that an LEP individual provide an interpreter in order to receive agency services.

**PUCN Language Access Coordinator:**

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**III. Profile of PUCN's LEP Clients -**

The PUCN is committed to tracking the languages preferred for communication among our limited English proficient (LEP) clients so that we can better provide meaningful, timely access to our services and programs without regard to any language impediments. Below is a data table summarizing relevant client data for the PUCN for the period of June 27, 2022, through August 13, 2022.

| <b>Language/Group Served</b>                | <b>Total #</b> | <b>% of Total</b> | <b>% of Total LEP</b> | <b>“Safe Harbor”?</b> | <b>Services/Programs Accessed</b> | <b>Notes</b>                                  |
|---|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>Total Clients</b>                        | 21             | 100%              | 100%                  | n/a                   |                                   | Questions on utility bills/dialed by mistake. |
| <b>Total Indigenous</b>                     |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |
| <b>Total Refugees</b>                       |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |
| <b>Total LEP Clients</b>                    | 21             | 100%              | 100%                  | n/a                   |                                   |   |
| <b>Specific Languages:</b>                  |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |
| - Spanish                                   | 21             | 100%              | 100%                  | n/a                   |                                   |   |
| - Tagalog                                   |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |
| - Chinese (incl. Cantonese, Mandarin, etc.) |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |
| - Korean                                    |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |
| - Vietnamese                                |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |
| - Amharic                                   |                |                   |                       |                       |                                   |   |

#### **IV. PUCN Language Access Services and Procedures -**

The PUCN has secured the language access services described below to enable our LEP clients to access our services and programs more fully. In every case, the PUCN ensures that all language service providers are fully competent to provide these services.

The PUCN has a Consumer Complaint Resolution Division responsible for responding to utility consumer needs, problems, and inquiries. The division is responsible for receiving, investigating, and mediating complaints that arise between customers and their serving utilities including electric, gas, telecommunications, water, and sewer.

##### **Oral/Sign Language Services**

The PUCN has bilingual speakers (both English and Spanish) available telephonically and in its offices located in Carson City and Las Vegas. For all other oral/sign languages the PUCN has procedures in place to contact language translation services contracted with the State of Nevada.

##### **Written Language Services**

Google translate is available on the PUCN's website. In addition, the PUCN's website directs consumers to Videos en Espanol on issues regarding utility regulation and related subjects.

##### **Community Outreach and Engagement**

The PUCN is committed to ensuring that the larger LEP community is aware of and able to access all available language services.

##### **Providing Notice of Language Assistance Services**

The PUCN will provide notification of the relevant points of contact within its office and online on its website.

#### **V. Implementing the PUCN's Language Access Services -**

The PUCN is committed to providing our LEP clients full access to our services and programs. Towards this end, the PUCN requires its staff to follow the procedures described below to ensure meaningful access to available language services. Moreover, the PUCN is committed to 100% compliance with these procedures and provides the staff with the training described below to help ensure that all staff are familiar with these procedures and recognize their importance to the PUCN's mission.

## **Language Access Procedures**

### **Identifying Client Language Needs and Preferred Language:**

Following a period of data gathering, the PUCN will assess of the data on the PUCN's LAP and will develop procedures to be followed to (1) interact appropriately with LEP clients, (2) inform clients of the availability of language services, (3) determine clients' preferred languages, and (4) record and track LEP client language preferences so that the data will follow them throughout their interactions with the PUCN staff.

### **Accessing Appropriate Oral/Sign Language Services:**

- The preferred method of serving LEP clients is by using competent bilingual staff able to provide services directly to in the client's preferred language without the need for an interpreter.
- Available, trained, competent bilingual staff may be used for in-person or telephone interpreting to support other staff.
- Staff should seek assistance from professional in-person or telephone interpreters when staff cannot meet language needs. Agency should recognize that certain circumstances may require specialized interpretation and translation services even when staff with bilingual abilities are available.
- Staff must be authorized to provide language services to communicate effectively even when such assistance is not requested by the customer.

### **Accessing Appropriate Written Language Services:**

The PUCN's primary point of contact with our LEP clients is our Consumer Complaint Resolution Division. Those interactions primarily address questions regarding utility bills. A determination of "vital" documents will be based on this interaction and will inform the necessary access to qualified written language services. This will apply both to written information intended for broad distribution as well as written communications between the PUCN and individual clients.

The PUCN will utilize State of Nevada contracted language translation services.

### **Language Services Quality Assurance:**

The PUCN is committed to ensuring that all language service providers it uses are qualified and competent to provide those services. The following procedures are in place to (1) establish provider qualifications and (2) track provider performance.

The PUCN will utilize State of Nevada contracted language translation services.

## **Staff Training Policies and Procedures**

The PUCN believes that the appropriate provision of language services is vital to the fulfillment of its mission. Towards that end, the PUCN ensures that its staff are familiar with its language access policies and the above procedures for providing said services.

## **VI. Evaluation of and Recommendations for the PUCN's Language Access Plan -**

The PUCN is committed to monitoring the performance of the above policies, procedures, and resources to ensure that its LAP is responsive to the needs of both the PUCN and the people it serves. At a minimum, the PUCN will review, evaluate, and update its LAP (if needed) biennially.

### **Processes for Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Parties Responsible for LAP Maintenance:** Breanne Potter, Commission Secretary

### **Criteria and Methods for LAP Evaluation:**

The PUCN will track its LAP's performance using the criteria indicated below. The methods for gathering/tracking the relevant data will initially include soliciting customer and staff satisfaction information in order to determine LAP needs and program compliance. The person responsible for tracking program process will update data quarterly and discuss program progress with the PUCN Executive Director.

### **Evaluation Outcomes and Proposed Changes**

The PUCN will evaluate LAP data and propose changes as necessary.

### **Proposed Budgetary Implications:**

No additional funding is required to meet the PUCN's language access requirements.

### **Suggested Legislative Amendments:**

No suggestions.