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**Report Determines That Limited English Proficient D.C. Residents Are Not Receiving Adequate Access to Government Services**

*Recommendations based on over 250 community member surveys and over 80 tests of city agencies*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WASHINGTON, DC, April 26, 2012** – American University Washington College of Law is announcing the release of a report titled *“Access Denied: The Unfulfilled Promise of the D.C. Language Access Act,”* a comprehensive examination of the city government’s compliance with a law designed to ensure that limited English proficient and no-English proficient (LEP/NEP) individuals have access to government services, programs, and activities. The report is a collaborative effort by the American University Washington College of Law Immigrant Justice Clinic, and the D.C. Language Access Coalition (DCLAC), an alliance of over 40 community-based and civil rights organizations that provide services to D.C.’s LEP communities.

Washington, D.C. is home to tens of thousands of LEP residents and business owners. In recognition of this significant community, D.C. government passed the D.C. Language Access Act in 2004 imposing affirmative obligations on entities that provide government-funded services to the public. The legislation is in line with federal policy establishing that failure to provide accessible federal services based upon language ability is a violation of basic civil rights.

“With the passage of the Language Access Act of 2004, the District of Columbia recognized that full language access is necessary in order to ensure that the city’s government runs smoothly, that the public’s health and safety is protected, and that all residents of D.C. have access to the benefits and services to which they are entitled,” noted David Steib, attorney at the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia.  “When D.C. government agencies fail to comply with the Act, the effect is not only dire for certain individuals but also widespread.”

The report examines government compliance with core requirements of the Language Access Act, including the provision of oral language services, translation of vital documents, training of agency staff, and outreach to LEP community members. “Our surveys revealed that 58% of LEP community members had experienced a language access difficulty at a D.C. government agency,” stated Michael Ramirez, a Student Attorney with the Immigrant Justice Clinic at American University. “This level of non-compliance stands in contrast to the generally positive self-reporting by the D.C. government.” The report also revealed deficiencies in government efforts to track language needs, and in the translation of vital documents and signs.

Based on these and other findings, the report makes several recommendations for reform and improvement upon the mechanisms currently utilized by D.C. government agencies, including the following:

* Adopt a robust and transparent approach to determining language needs of customers and potential customers.
* Ensure that all agency personnel who interface with members of the public are regularly trained on the Act, basic interpretation and translation protocols, use of in-person and telephonic interpretation services, availability of translated documents within the agency, and cross-cultural communication.
* Redouble compliance efforts targeted to languages other than Spanish, particularly Asian and African languages.
* Create a private right of action and right to appeal decisions by OHR under the Act.
* Encourage collaboration and training across covered entities, and highlight best practices.

For more information, please contact: Jennifer Koduru, Student Attorney with the Immigrant Justice Clinic at American University Washington College of Law at (202) 664-6626 or via email at jen.koduru@gmail.com. For more information about the Washington College of Law, please contact Franki Fitterer, Director of Public Relations, at (202) 275-4279 (office), (202) 321-6183 (cell), or via e-mail at ffitterer@wcl.american.edu.

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**American University Washington College of Law**

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 **D.C. Language Access Coalition**

The D.C. Language Access Coalition (DCLAC) was created under the D.C. Language Access Act of 2004 to aid in implementation of the law. DCLAC is an alliance of more than 40 community-based organizations and civil rights organizations, which all provide services to D.C.’s African, Asian, and Latino Communities. DCLAC works to ensure that the D.C. Language Access Act is fully implemented and that all LEP/NEP individuals can equally access public services, programs, and activities by receiving translation and interpretation services in their native languages.