

Department of Veterans' Services, DVS

Language Access Plan

Friday, March 22, 2013

I. Introduction

The Department of Veterans' Services ("DVS") has prepared this Language Access Plan ("LAP" or "Plan"), which defines the actions to be taken by DVS to ensure meaningful access to agency services, programs and activities on the part of persons who have limited English proficiency. DVS will review and update, on a biannual basis, this LAP in order to ensure continued responsiveness to community needs and compliance with the Executive Office for Administration and Finance ("ANF") Administrative Bulletin #16.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to ensure DVS clients of meaningful access to services, programs and activities although they may be limited in their English language proficiency.

DVS is committed to this Language Access Plan to meet our clients' respective needs. The Plan is consistent with the requirements of Administrative Bulletin #16 as promulgated by ANF.

Consistent with the guidance of ANF Administration Bulletin #16, a Limited English Proficient ("LEP") person is someone who is not able to speak, read, write or understand the English language at a level that allows him/her to interact effectively with DVS staff. A client maintains the right to self-identify as a LEP person.

III. Agency Description

The mission of DVS is to be the chief advocate for the nearly half-million veterans of the Commonwealth and their families. DVS establishes policy, proposes legislation, ensures that adequate funding for veterans' programs is included in the Governor's budget, and represents the interests of veterans in matters coming before the General Court. In addition, DVS represents all state agencies and individual veterans and their eligible family members before the federal Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA") in securing federal benefits, rights and privileges that may be available.

DVS oversees two major financial assistance programs:

- Chapter 115 Financial Assistance Program for eligible veterans and their families. By law, every municipality is required to employ a Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) to assist veterans and their eligible family members in obtaining financial assistance, employment, federal benefits, and other services they may be entitled to. The VSOs complete and process the applications for financial assistance and submit to this Department for annual reimbursement of 75% of expenditures incurred by each municipality under this program. DVS works exclusively with the VSOs, and therefore, does not interact directly with the client base. Our annual budget for these municipal reimbursements is approximately \$42 Million within the DVS total annual budget. In FY 12 DVS assisted over 9500 Veterans in this program.
- The Annuity Program pays \$2,000 annually to every 100% service-connected disabled veterans, every Gold Star parent, and every Gold Star spouse. DVS currently serves over 10,600 annuitants. These annuities represent approximately \$22M within the DVS total annual budget.

IV. Language Access Plan:

Approach: the DVS Language Access Plan shall be fully implemented subject to the availability of fiscal resources to implement the LAP. This Plan has been developed to adhere to the Language Access Guidelines of ANF Administrative Bulletin #16. This Plan represents DVS's administrative blueprint to provide meaningful access to our services, programs and activities on the part of LEP individuals. This Plan outlines the tasks that DVS will undertake to meet this objective.

Language Access Plan:

- (1) Agency Language Access Coordinator:
Cheryl Lussier Poppe
600 Washington Street, 7th Floor, Boston, MA 02111
(617) 210-5779
cpoppe@massmail.state.ma.us

(2) Agency Access needs Assessment:

a. Although DVS does not meet or exceed the 5% threshold requirement identified under ANF Administrative Bulletin #16, DVS has implemented policies and procedures that are consistent with the guidelines and objectives of LAP. Approximately 10% of the DVS staff is bi-lingual including speakers of Spanish, Portuguese, Portuguese Creole, French and Greek. As a whole, the veteran population is uniquely static with respect to LEP. However, due to the low frequency of occurrences, it is difficult to establish in advance an accurate percentage of veteran's spouses and family members that would require either an oral interpreter or a sign language interpreter. An interpreter resource is currently determined at the time that a spouse or family member actually contacts their local VSO or our offices.

DVS Programs:

- Chapter 115 Financial Assistance Program - DVS has developed a statewide, state of the art web-based software system known as Web-VSMIS. This software system is used by all VSOs for the 351 cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth to complete and process applications for chapter 115 veterans' benefits. It should be noted that the VSOs also assist applicants with Federal Veterans Affairs (VA) Benefits.

To ensure that VSOs are able to assist all veterans and their eligible family members, DVS incorporated a "Special Situations" section within the Web-VSMIS. This section enables the VSO to identify and deploy necessary resources to assist veterans and their families with the following:

- Physical/Mental Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Visually Impaired
- Interpreter Required
- Sign Language Interpreter Required
- Other: Specify

As part of DVS's LAP research, we generated a statistical report via Web-VSMIS that showed that only 9 applicants or about 0.1% of approximately 9,500 applicants requested an oral interpreter to assist them. The same report showed that no (0%) applicants requested a sign language interpreter.

- Chapter 115 Annuity Program- This program is centrally located at the DVS offices in Boston. This annuity is given in recognition of the service of our distinguished 100% service-connected disabled veterans and to the parents of distinguished veterans (Gold Star Parents) and the un-remarried spouses (Gold Star Wives or Husbands) of distinguished veterans who gave their lives in the service of their country during wartime.

The Annuity Program Director reported that in FY'12 there have not been no situations (0%) requiring an oral interpreter or a sign language interpreter out of the approximately 10,600 annuitants.

- Housing and Outreach Centers - Outreach Centers by and large are non-profit organizations that contract through DVS to assist veterans and their eligible family members with a range of services. These services vary by locality and may include: assistance and referrals to obtain federal VA benefits and chapter 115 veterans' benefits; counseling services; food pantry and clothing closets; transportation services; community activities may also be available.

There are currently 32 Veteran Housing and Outreach Centers located throughout the Commonwealth. During FY'12 these organizations provided an array of services to approximately 2,000 eligible veterans and their families. To date none (0%) of the Outreach Centers reported any request for an oral interpreter or a sign language interpreter.

- Statewide Advocacy for Veterans' Empowerment (Save) Team – was established on February 11, 2008. This program's primary mission is prevention of suicide and mental health distress through the identification of unique issues facing veterans when they return home by proactively providing them with access to benefits and services that may help address these issues and result in positive transitions back to civilian life.

The SAVE Team acts as a liaison between veterans and their families and the various federal and state agencies. SAVE Team members advocate for veterans, who because of institutional or personal barriers, are not able to obtain the benefits they have earned.

SAVE has served over 1600 veterans since its inception. The SAVE Program Director reported that there were 3 (less than 1%) requests for oral interpreters and no (0%) requests for a sign language interpreter. We are working on developing SAVE posters in Spanish to insure we are reaching family members and helping them to access services.

Statewide Housing Advocacy for Reintegration and Prevention (SHARP)

SHARP is a program funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs based upon the peer concept of the SAVE model to prevent and end homelessness among the Veteran population. To date, SHARP has housed 49 of 50 clients eligible for VA Supportive Housing (VASH) Vouchers. To date, SHARP has received 0 requests for oral interpreters and 0 requests for ASL interpreters. At least one of the team members are bilingual and can assist clients with language difficulties as needed.

- Women Veterans' Network (WVN) - WVN is centrally located at the DVS offices in Boston. The mission statement of WVN is to:
 - Provide women veterans with information on federal, state and local benefits.
 - Expand awareness of the needs of women veterans and identify available health and human resources to meet those needs.
 - Advocate on behalf of women veterans in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
 - There are approximately 15,000 women veterans' in the WVN database. The Program Coordinator, who is fluent in two languages besides English, reported that there were no (0%) requests for an oral interpreter and no (0%) requests for a sign language interpreter. She has done an interview on a local Spanish station to expand awareness of programs available to women veterans.

- Veterans Cemetery (State) - In May 2001 the first Massachusetts Veterans' Memorial Cemetery opened in Agawam. A second state cemetery opened in Winchendon in November 2004. Eligible deceased veterans can be buried in these state cemeteries at no cost and their deceased spouses can be buried for a nominal fee.

- VA Representatives (Liaison) - The VA administers a variety of federal benefits and services that provide financial and other forms of assistance to veterans, their dependents, and survivors. Major benefits include Veterans' compensation, Veterans' pension, survivors' benefits, rehabilitation and employment assistance, education assistance, home loan guaranties, and life insurance coverage. DVS has two offices at the JFK Building and the Providence VA to assist in these efforts.

- Although DVS and municipal VSOs need for interpretive services fall well below the 5% threshold, DVS is committed to ensuring that all clients have access to our programs. Accordingly, DVS has contracted with Rapport International to provide telephonic and in-person interpretive services whenever need for the same arises.

- a. Language Makeup of Client Population (This outlines the population as a whole. The Veteran population from the Sep 2010 VA database is 416,443; the LEP of the veteran client population is estimated to be lower than Massachusetts as a whole). * Indicates that the population has been identified as speaking English "less than well".

Based on 2009 Census for Massachusetts (Total Population)

LANGUAGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Population 5 years and over	6,208,685	100
Speak only English	4,926,679	79.4
*Other than English:	1,282,006	20.6
Spanish	203,601	3.28%
Indo-European	202,895	3.27%
Asian Pacific	108,142	1.80%
Other	21,778	0.40%

- b. Points of Contact between DVS and Client Population (DVS Office including regional offices, website address (es), main telephone numbers, etc.
- Chapter 115 Benefits - VSOs - reference [Mass. Department of Veterans](#)
 - Community Outreach Provider's – reference Attachment A
 - Save Team – VSOs - [Mass. Department of Veterans](#) (617) 210-5743 or 1-888-844-2838, Option #2
 - Annuity Program – DVS, [Mass. Department of Veterans](#), (617) 210-5904
 - Women Veterans' Network – DVS, [Mass. Department of Veterans](#), 617-210-5958
 - Veterans' Cemetery (State) – DVS, [Mass. Department of Veterans](#), Agawam (413) 821-9500, Winchendon (978) 297-9501.
 - VA Representative (Liaison) – Tim.Sullivan@VA.Gov, (617) 303-5545
 - Web Portal: [Mass VetsAdvisor](#)

(3) Language Resources Assessment:

Listed below are the capabilities of existing staff that are linguistically, culturally, and technically able to deliver services in a language other than English and/or to serve as interpreters:

- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Portuguese Creole
- French
- Greek

Community-based resources available to be deployed to assist agency in meeting language access needs

- 10% DVS Staff
- Rapport International under contract with DVS
- Department of Public Health
- VSO municipal employees for each City/Town
- Family members and Friends of Applicants (This is the least favorable option only to be employed when all other means are exhausted to make appointments for future contact)
- Veteran Administration (VA)
- Community Outreach Providers, to include the National Guard Outreach Program

(4) Language Service Protocols:

- a. Which language services are required to implement the Language Access Plan:

In-person interpretation would consist of:

- DVS bilingual employee(s),
- Municipal bilingual employee(s),
- Family member and/or friends

- Rapport International under contract with DVS
- Veteran Administration (VA)

Telephonic interpretation would consist of:

- DVS bilingual employee(s),
- Municipal bilingual employee(s),
- Family member and/or friends
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- Rapport International under contract with DVS.
- VA Representative

- b. Define and describe Agency's language access protocols for providing interpretation services

DVS is currently below the 5% threshold mandated by ANF Administrative Bulletin #16. The stakeholders appear to be very familiar with the languages spoken in their service areas and have identified municipal employees, family members and friends that are bi-lingual in these languages. If the need for an interpreter arises, then the stakeholder should contact the appropriate resource. Also, DVS plans to disseminate to all of its service providers and municipal VSOs, information about the services offered by Rapport International.

- c. Define how a client will be able to access and utilize the resources identified in paragraphs (a) and (b).

- Contact local VSO [Mass. Department of Veterans](#) (Look under "Find your VSO")
- Contact area Veterans' Outreach Centers and Housing Providers - reference Attachment A
- Contact DVS – 617-210-5480
- DVS website: [Mass. Department of Veterans](#)
- VA Representative– Tim.Sullivan@VA.Gov, (617) 303-5545

(5) Vital Document Translation:

a. When the 5% threshold is broached, DVS will conduct a feasibility study to determine what if any vital documents (in whole or in part) shall be translated to include a timeframe for translation. Given the uniquely static nature of the veteran population with respect to LEP, coupled with the phenomenon of little to no need for English interpretation, as well as, budget constraints, DVS has determined that the feasibility of allocating resources and man-hours to translation of vital documents is unlikely at this time.

b. Agency website content: As instructed by the LAP oversight committee, DVS's website translation plan will be developed and submitted at a later date.

(6) Stakeholder consultations:

DVS held consultations with the stakeholders identified in Web-VSMIS report as having required the need for an interpreter. DVS also contacted a sample of other stakeholders identified in Web-VSMIS reports as having no need for an interpreter. DVS also consulted with its DVS Program Directors and Coordinator's who in turn held consultations with their respective stakeholders. The results of these consultations culminated into this Plan.

(7) Staff Training:

Although DVS does not meet or exceed the 5% threshold identified in the ANF Administrative Bulletin #16, we have implemented policies and procedures that are consistent with the guidelines and objectives of the Governor's Language Access initiative and intend to hold an informational session with its staff, service providers, and municipal VSOs about DVS interpretive service contract with Rapport International. As additional language access resources are identified, DVS will introduce these new resources to its staff and stakeholders alike via electronic media (DVS website, email, access to web-cast training via the DVS website, and Virtual Gateway). If it is determined to be feasible by stakeholders, then DVS will conduct regional training sessions for stakeholders and their respective staffs. We will also deploy some of our marketing materials in another language, starting with Spanish, to reach more families.

(8) Notice to Public: When the 5% threshold is exceeded, DVS will initiate steps to notify clients of no cost language assistance, which including but not limited to the following:

- DVS web site
- Stakeholder's web-site(s).
- DVS "Welcome Home Package" targeted mailings
- DVS literature for the various programs
- Stakeholders' respective literature for various services

(9) Agency Monitoring:

As stated previously, one of the four key elements to an effective language assistance plan is to monitor the plan. To that end, on a bi-annual schedule DVS shall:

- Monitor the various DVS databases do determine if the stakeholders are approaching the 5% threshold.
- Monitor the various DVS databases to ensure that when applicants are identified by a stakeholder as requiring an oral interpreter or a sign language interpreter, that current DVS policies and guidelines are followed by the stakeholder(s) and are successful. If current DVS policies and guidelines are not successful, then DVS will evaluate the same and make appropriate modifications.
- Review the language needs of future applicants and existing clients to determine whether existing language assistance services are meeting the needs of LEP persons.
- Assess whether DVS staff, service providers, and municipal VSOs are knowledgeable about DVS's LAP policies and guidelines and about implementation of the same. If necessary, provide additional training.
- Assess whether the sources of and arrangements for language access assistance are still current and viable. Upgrade resources and guidelines as necessary.

- (10) Complaints: At this time, an applicant (client) or representative would contact (by telephone, letter or email) the Language Access Coordinator, Department of Veterans' Services.

Language Access Complaint Procedure

You may file a complaint with the DVS Language Access Coordinator or the Office of Access and Opportunity if you believe you have been denied the benefits of this Plan. You must file your complaint within 6 months of the alleged denial. You must file a written complaint. To file a complaint with the Language Access Coordinator, submit the written complaint to:

Cheryl Lussier Poppe
600 Washington Street, 7th Floor
Boston, MA 02111
(617) 210-5779
cpoppe@massmail.state.ma.us

To file a complaint with the Office of Access and Opportunity, please submit the written complaint to the attention of:

Office of Access and Opportunity
Executive Office of Administration and Finance
State House, Room 373
Boston, MA 02133
Ronald.Marlow@state.ma.us

Name
Agency Head
Date:

Secretary John W. Polanowicz
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Appendix A

DVS Provider Contact List 2013

Agency	Type
Amesbury	Food Pantry
<u><i>Our Neighbor's Table</i></u>	
P.O. Box 592, 145 Main Street	
Amesbury, MA 01913	
(978) 388-1907 Office	
Lyndsey Haight, Executive Director	
ourneighborstable@verizon.net	
Beverly	Outreach Services
North Shore Veterans Counseling Services, Inc.	
9 Park Street	
Beverly, MA 01915	
(978) 921-4851, (978) 921-8413 (FAX)	
Lynn Pellino, Executive Director	
nsvets98@aol.com	
Fall River	Outreach Services
Veterans Association of Bristol County	
755 Pine Street, P.O. Box 9091	
Fall River, MA 02720	
(508) 679-9277, (508) 677-9663 (FAX)	
Magali Bouchard, Executive Director	
Vabc@verizon.net	
Veterans' Association of Bristol County, Inc.	
Bedford	Housing Services - 60 SRO's
<u><i>Bedford Supportive Housing</i></u>	
Caritas Communities	
25 Braintree Hill Office Park	
Suite 206	
Braintree, MA 02184	
781-843-1242	
Tom Nee, Program Director	

Agency	Type
Falmouth	
Cape Cod Free Clinic	
107 Commercial Street	
Mashpee, MA 02649	
(508)-477-7090, (508) 477-7028 (FAX)	
Karen Gardner, Executive Director	
kgardner@capecodclinic.org	
Gardner	Outreach Services - 12 Transitional
<u>Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, Inc.</u>	
268 Central Street	
Gardner, MA 01440	
(978) 632-9601, (978) 632-9476 (FAX)	
Charles Bollinger	
cbollinger@veterans-outreach.com	
Haverhill	Homeless & Outreach Services - 47 Transitional
Veterans Northeast Outreach Center, Inc	
65 Cedar Street	
Haverhill, MA 01830	
(978) 372-3626 (Reed St), (978) 521-9668 (Cedar St)	
Fax: (978) 521-9672	
John Ratka, Executive Director	
vetadmin@northeastveterans.org	
Hyannis	Homeless & Outreach Services - 16 Transitional
Nam Vets Association of the Cape and Islands, Inc.	
565 Main Street	
P.O. Box 2873	
Hyannis, MA 02601	
(508) 778-1590 , (508) 778-1094 (FAX)	
Merrill Blum , Executive Director	
namvets@capecod.net	
Leeds	Homeless & Outreach Services - 160
Soldier On	

Agency	Type
360 West Housatonic Street	
Pittsfield, MA	
Tel: (413)-582-3059 (Steve ext. 2288, Rebekah-5267, Jack- 2277)	
Fax (413) 582-3075 John Downing, Executive Director	
jdowning@wesoldieron.org	
Steven.como@verizon.net	
scomo@wesolideron.org	
Leominster/Fitchburg	Homeless & Outreach Services - 25 Units
Veteran Hospice Homestead	
69 High Street	
Fitchburg, MA 01420	
(978) 353 0234, (978) 345 0926 (FAX)	
Leslie Lightfoot, Executive Director	
leslie@vethospice.com	
tara@vethospice.com	
Leominster	Homeless Services
Hero Homestead	
25 Grove Ave	
Leominster, MA	
(978) 353-0234, (978) 345-0926 (FAX)	
Leslie Lightfoot , Executive Director	
Info@vethospice.com	
Marlboro	Homeless Services
Veterans Outreach Center MetroWest	
255 Main Street, Suite 213	
Marlboro, MA 01752	
Paul Carew, Executive Director	
976-372-3626	
Natick	Outreach Services
<u>Morse Institute library</u>	
143 E. Central Street	
Natick, MA 01760	
(508) 647-6523 (508) 647-6527 (FAX)	
Linda Stetson, Director	

Agency	Type
Jane Findlay, Asst. Exec. Director	
Plymouth	Oral History Project
Nathan Hale Foundation	
15 Main Street Extension	
Plymouth, MA 02360	
(508)-747-2003	
Chris Hart, Exec. Director	
The Nathan Hale Foundation	
Boston	Outreach Services
<u>Pine Street Inn Veterans Services</u>	
444 Harrison Ave	
Boston MA, 02110	
Lyndia Downing CEO	
1-617-892-9201	
Riccardo.White@pinestreetinn.org	
Springfield	Outreach Services
Boston Metro	
P.O. Box 70185 , Springfield MA 01104	
281 Franklin Street	
Springfield, MA 01107	
Gumersindo Gomez, Executive Director	
(617) 778-1310, (617) 778-1309 (FAX)	
pagan91b20@hotmail.com	
Springfield	
<u>Mason Square Veterans Outreach Center</u>	
143 Eastern Ave	
Springfield, MA 01109	
(413) 886-0480 phone (413) 886-0484	
James Gray, President, 413-627-7070	
Chris Scott, Executive Director	
cscott@masonsquarevets.com	
rockingchair@verizon.net	
Springfield	Outreach Services - 12 Units
SFC Jorge Otero Barreto Homeless Veterans Transition House	
52 Maple Ct	
Springfield, MA 01105	

Agency	Type
House Manager, Edwin Vazquez	
(413) 739-1082	
Edcaz584@yahoo.com	
(413) 731-0194, (413) 883-4508 (Cell) (413) 736-2008(FAX)	
Gumersindo Gomez, Executive Director	
sgtgomez@aol.com	
Springfield	
<i>Puerto Rican Veterans' Association of Mass., Inc.</i>	
d/b/a Springfield Bilingual Veterans Outreach Center	
P.O. Box 70185	
Springfield, MA 01107	
281 Franklin Street,	
Springfield MA 01104	
(413) 731-0194, (413) 883-4508 (Cell) (413) 736-2008(FAX)	
Gumersindo Gomez, Executive Director	
sgtgomez@aol.com	
Springfield	Homeless & Outreach Services
<i>CPL Zayas Bilingual Veterans outreach Center Boston</i>	
719 Tremont Street	
Boston, MA 02118	
(617) 778-1310 (617) 778-1309 FAX	
Jorge Pagan, Director	
Pagan91b20@yahoo.com	
Lynn	Outreach Services
<i>Habitat P.L.U.S. Inc.</i>	
516-520 Essex Street	
Lynn, MA 01902	
(781) 599-8578, (781) 593 6332 (FAX) (781)632-3268 (cell)	
Susan Campbell, Executive Director	
Habitatp@verizon.net	
SCamp39296@aol.com	
Housing Providers:	

Agency	Type
Boston	Homeless & Outreach Services-9 VA per diem
<u>New England Center for Veterans</u>	
17 Court Street	
Boston, MA 02108	
(617) 371-1800 (617) 371-1771 (FAX)	
Andrew McCawley , CEO	
Andy.mccawley@neshv.org	
Kevin Ward, CFO	
(617) 371-1717	
kevinw@neshv.org	
Leeds	
<u>Soldier On</u>	
421 N. Main Street	
Leeds, MA 01053-9764	
Tel: (413)-582-3059 (Steve ext. 2288, Rebekah –5267, Jack- 2277)	
Fax (413) 582-3075	
John Downing, Executive Director	
Steven.como@verizon.net	
New Bedford	Homeless Services - 105 Units
<u>"Veterans Transition House"</u>	
Southeastern Mass. Veterans Housing Programs, Inc.	
20 Willis Street	
New Bedford, MA 02740	
(508) 992- 5313, (508) 999-3909 (FAX)	
James A. Reid, Executive Director	
Jim@vetshouse.com	
Martin H. Lahue, Controller	
martin@vetshouse.org	
Worcester	Homeless & Outreach Services
<u>Veterans Inc.</u>	
69 Grove Street	
Worcester, MA 01605	
(508) 791-1213 (508) 791-5296(FAX)	

Agency	Type
Denis Leary, Executive Director	
Denisleary@massveterans.org	