**Long Island Language Advocates Coalition (L.I.L.A.C.)**

**Mission Statement**

The Long Island Language Advocates Coalition (L.I.L.A.C.) is a coalition of individuals and organizations based on Long Island who are concerned about the unequal access to programs, such as health care, law enforcement, social services, education, and justice through the courts, by persons with limited English proficiency.   We seek to assure that all our community members receive full and equal access to these programs and services. We aim to do this by highlighting the systemic issues that create barriers to meaningful access, advocating for the removal of these barriers, and educating on the advantages of systemic change.

**History**

In the fall of 2010, advocates from community organizations on Long Island came together at Touro Law Center to explore common concerns regarding the lack of available services for people with limited English proficiency (LEP). We identified a number of government funded service providers who were not meeting their obligations under Titled VI of the Civil Rights Act, including the police department, the Department of Social Services and the Suffolk County court system. We sent out inquiries to other organizations to see if they were observing similar problems. The response was tremendous. Advocates from all across Long Island came forward with similar stories about failures within the system to provide meaningful access to services for people who speak, read or write little or no English. Many had experienced difficulty accessing healthcare or domestic violence services. We decided that we wanted to take action to address these inequities. And so, the Long Island Language Advocates Coalition (LILAC) was born.

**Committees**

**Court Committee**

The mission of the LILAC Courts Committee is to champion the rights of LEP persons throughout the judicial system by ensuring that New York courts comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, 42 U.S.C. §2000d; any other applicable laws; and the United States Department of Justice requirements relating to language access, which include, but are not limited to proper signage, qualified interpretation, and translation services, in order to ensure that due process is provided to all persons regardless of their ability to read, speak, or write English*.*

**Police Committee**

The Police Committee of LILAC concentrates on advocating and improving access and services for LEP people related to the police department. We focus on ensuring that adequate translation services are provided and being used, that police directives concerning LEP persons are being implemented and support efforts to increase the number of bilingual officers.

**Social Services Committee**

The purpose of the Social Services Committee is to obtain meaningful access for LEP people to all programs and services, which are administered by the Department of Social Services. This includes benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid, public assistance, emergency services, and childcare. We seek to reduce the barriers which LEP people face when trying to access these services by documenting these problems, monitoring our local agency, and advising them regarding best practices so that they can make the necessary improvements.

**Education Committee**

The mission of the Education Committee is to provide support and guidance with a holistic approach to educational organizations that serve LEP community members. In addition, the Educational Committee is willing to assist the educational organizations to implement cultural and linguistically appropriate services for the benefits of the community and the upcoming generations.

**Health Committee**

The Health Committee under LILAC is concerned with the unequal access to LEP persons in the areas of hospitals, clinics and all medical concerns.  The committee seeks to insure that the LEP population receives full and equal access to health systems that will improve their quality of life.

**Some of LILAC’s Accomplishment**

* LILAC members have been meeting on a monthly basis since 2010. Our membership continues to grow and includes advocates from a diversity of organizations in both Nassau and Suffolk counties.
* LILAC’s Court committee submitted a Freedom of Information Request (FOIL) to the New York State Office of Court Administration regarding the use of in-person and telephone interpreters in the Suffolk County Family Court. After meeting with the Suffolk Courts Administrator, the Family Courts improved their signage, more staff training was provided, and the use of interpreter phone service increased.
* LILAC partnered with other organizations and successfully advocated in favor of the Safe RX Bill requiring labeling of prescription drugs in the patient’s native and in an easy-to-understand language.
* LILAC’s Social Services Committee has met with the commissioner and administration of the Suffolk County Department of Social Services on numerous occasions to discuss the adequacy of phone line services to LEP individuals. As a result, the agency reassigned bilingual workers to the Emergency Services Unit and HEAP Unit. Our recommendations also made the Department of Social Services improve their signage in their offices, translating documents, offering cultural diversity trainings, and develop an LEP task force.
* LILAC successfully advocated with the Town of Islip to improve translation of their Section 8 housing subsidy application and website. We also obtained a 30-day extension of the deadline to permit LEP applicants to apply for Section 8 vouchers while the application form was being properly translated.
* LILAC’s Police Committee submitted a FOIL request to the Suffolk County Police Department regarding their translation and interpretation policies and also maintained an ongoing dialogue with them. Our advocacy resulted in improved signage, training, and the issuance of an updated LEP directive for the Suffolk County Police Department on February 4, 2011.
* On September 21, 2011, following the issuance of the Department of Justice recommendations, LILAC participated in a press conference at the Suffolk County Police Department Third Precinct urging the police to remove the barriers to equal justice for LEP people.
* On January 19, 2012, LILAC met with members of the Suffolk County Executive’s Office to inform them of the problems LEP Suffolk County residents experienced when trying to access government-funded programs and services. We encouraged the County Executive to take immediate action to address these problems on a countywide level.
* On November 9, 2012, LILAC successfully held its first annual conference titled “Everyone is Talking about it: Raising Awareness about Language Access for a Better Long Island.”
* On November 14, 2012, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone signed a Language Access Executive Order (10-2012) requiring county agencies to translate vital documents into the six most commonly used languages and provide interpretation for people who are LEP by November 14, 2013. LILAC has worked together with the County Executive’s office and various organizations to ensure its enactment, to review the agency language access plans and to monitor its implementation.
* Since its inception, LILAC members have conducted trainings for educators, librarians, healthcare providers, community advocates and various service providers
* On July 15, 2013 and August 30, 2013, the Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano signed two Language Access Executive Orders (67 and 72) assuring translation and interpretation services to all LEP individuals in Nassau County. These two Language Access Executive Orders would not have been possible without the advocacy that LILAC and other organizations conducted to get these two orders enacted.
* On November 15, 2013, :LILAC held its second language access conference, attracting 150 participants.
* Participating organizations include: Empire Justice Center, SEPA Mujer, VIBS Family Violence and Rape Crisis Services, Family Service League, LI Jobs with Justice, The Bonjour Club, CARECEN, Middle Country Public Library, The Early Years Institute, Southside Hospital, Sisters United in Health, National Association of Puerto Rican and Hispanic Social Workers, NY Civil Liberties Union, Neighbors in Support of Immigrants, LI Housing Services, LI Center for Independent Living, Make the Road NY, Nassau Childcare Council, Brighter Tomorrows and others!

**For further information, please visit our website:** [**www.longislandlanguageadvocates.org**](http://www.longislandlanguageadvocates.org) **or contact Cheryl Keshner, LILAC coordinator at (631) 650-2317,** **ckeshner@empirejustice.org****.**