



GREATER BOSTON
LEGAL SERVICES
...and justice for all

November 15, 2011

Lydia Conley
Deputy Assistance Commissioner for Policy,
Program and External Relations
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111

Re: Language Access Complaint

Dear Ms. Conley:

I'm writing to you in your capacity as DTA Language Access Coordinator to file a complaint on behalf of my client, E S.

Ms. S is a disabled Spanish speaker who recently tried to reapply for SNAP benefits after discovering that her October benefits were not in her account. Ms. S is an SSI recipient who must spend her entire monthly benefit on rent, leaving her dependent solely on SNAP benefits in order to feed herself and her son. Ms. S's attached statement in Spanish recounts the following efforts to get her SNAP benefits back:

She first attempted to contact the Malden TAO by phone to ask why she hadn't received her SNAP benefits. The person who answered the general TAO number did not speak Spanish and did not obtain an interpreter, so Ms. S was unable to get any information.

Despite serious physical problems that make it difficult for her to walk, Ms. S then went to the Malden TAO in person on 9/12/11. Upon arriving, she immediately asked for a Spanish interpreter so that she could communicate about her SNAP problem. The receptionist did not obtain an interpreter and – as best Ms. S could understand with her limited English – instructed her to bring her own interpreter. The receptionist indicated that Ms. S should go to an upstairs waiting room, but did not take Ms. S's name or offer her the opportunity to sign in. Ms. S went and waited for a while, but then concluded that no worker was likely to come looking for her and went home.

Ms. S next went to the Revere TAO, which previously had her case, seeking assistance. She did speak to a Spanish-speaking receptionist there, but was told that office couldn't help her because she now lives in Everett.

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Ms. S returned to the Malden TAO on 9/21/11 and the receptionist again failed to provide her with an interpreter. As a result, Ms. S was unable to explain why she was there or to file a new application.

At that point, Ms. S contacted GBLS. After determining that her benefits had stopped due to a missed recertification, I contacted Assistant Director Karen Delmonico, who was extremely helpful in facilitating a new application and promptly issuing Ms. S's SNAP benefits. However, the failure of the Malden TAO reception staff to follow DTA's interpreter services policy and Language Access Plan resulted in substantial delay, leaving Ms. S without benefits to purchase food for over a month. Moreover, without the intervention of an advocate, Ms. S might never have gotten her SNAP benefits reinstated.

I ask that DTA take steps to ensure that Ms. S and all LEP clients are provided with appropriate language access at the Malden TAO whenever needed. Please contact me at (617) 603-1621 or nmeyer@gbls.org to discuss this matter. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Naomi Meyer
Senior Attorney
Welfare Law Unit

Cc: Camille Ferrullo, Director, Malden TAO
Karen Delmonico, Assistant Director, Malden TAO