



GREATER BOSTON
LEGAL SERVICES
...and justice for all

October 31, 2012

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, I D.

Mr. D is a disabled Spanish speaker with limited English proficiency who received EAEDC from May until his SSDI was recently approved. He continues to receive SNAP benefits.

As explained in his attached statement, Mr. D expressly asked for an interpreter for his May EAEDC application, but was not provided with one then or for subsequent appointments and phone calls. It seems likely that, had Mr. D not already been familiar with the required verifications due to a previous EAEDC application with a Spanish-speaking worker, he would have had significant trouble completing the application process in May. Without an interpreter to facilitate communication, Mr. D received no explanation of the documents he was signing and was unable to ask any questions about program rules. When he later called to inquire about the notice of SNAP reduction for September, he was unable to communicate sufficiently to find out how to maximize his benefits through countable medical expenses.

I contacted Assistant Director Diane Deban, who was very helpful in agreeing to assign Mr. D's case to a Spanish-speaking SNAP worker and to appropriately count his medical expenses. However, it is concerning that Mr. D faced such a significant communication barrier with his EAEDC worker that he could not get his questions answered. As you know, DTA's failure to provide an interpreter, even after Mr. D explicitly requested one, was in violation of DTA's own Language Access Plan and the protocols established in Field Operations Memorandum 2008-16, as well as federal SNAP regulations and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations.

I ask that DTA take steps to ensure that Mr. D and all LEP clients are provided with appropriate language access services at the Newmarket Square TAO whenever requested or needed. Please

Lydia Conley
October 31, 2012
Page 2

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: Ronald Marlow, Assistant Secretary for Access and Opportunity
Elizabeth Czolpinski, Assistant Director, Newmarket Square TAO
Richard Fratus, Assistant Director, Newmarket Square TAO
Diane Deban, Assistant Director, Newmarket Square TAO

Declaración de I D

Yo hablo español, que es mi lengua materna. Hablo muy poco de inglés.

Estoy incapacitado y no puedo trabajar. Por eso, pedí los beneficios en efectivo de EAEDC. La primera vez, me entrevistaron en español y no tuve problemas con la solicitud, pero me negaron porque yo todavía tenía demasiados ahorros.

Después de gastar los ahorros, solicité el EAEDC de nuevo el 15 de mayo de 2012. Me tocó un trabajador que no hablaba español. Tuve dos citas con él para completar la solicitud.

Durante la primera cita, yo pedí hablar con alguien que hablara español porque no podía comunicarme bien con el trabajador. Sin embargo, él me ignoró y no buscó a un intérprete. Él me enseñó varios documentos para firmar y yo firmé, pero no me explicaba nada de lo que yo estaba firmando. Yo quería hacer varias preguntas, pero no pude expresarme. Afortunadamente, yo sabía más o menos cuales documentos yo tenía que llevarle porque yo me acordé desde la solicitud anterior.

Después de que se abrió mi caso, llamé a mi trabajador dos veces con preguntas sobre mis beneficios. La primera vez, como no pude comunicarme con él, tuve que pedir a mi hermano que llamara por mi parte. La segunda vez, mi hermano no estaba disponible para ayudarme, entonces yo mismo hice la llamada. Hablé con mi trabajador e intenté hacer mi pregunta, pero no entendí su respuesta.

Antes de hablar con mi abogada de Servicios Legales de Boston, yo no sabía que yo podía reportar mis gastos médicos para aumentar mis cupones de alimentos. Si hubiera un intérprete, tal vez mi trabajador me hubiera explicado esa regla.

Por estos problemas de comunicación, pedí que trasladaran mi caso a un trabajador que hablara español.

ID

Fecha

Translation:

Statement of I D

I speak Spanish, which is my mother tongue. I speak very little English.

I am disabled and cannot work. For this reason, I requested EAEDC cash benefits. The first time, I was interviewed in Spanish and I didn't have problems with the application, but I was denied because I still had too much savings.

After spending my savings, I applied for EAEDC again on May 15, 2012. They gave me a worker who didn't speak Spanish. I had two meetings with him to complete the application.

During the first meeting, I asked to speak with someone who spoke Spanish because I couldn't communicate well with the worker. However, he ignored me and didn't look for an interpreter. He showed me various forms to sign and I signed, but he didn't explain to me anything about what I was signing. I wanted to ask various questions, but I couldn't express myself. Fortunately, I knew more or less which documents I had to bring him because I remembered from the prior application.

After my case was opened, I called my worker twice with questions about my benefits. The first time, since I couldn't communicate with him, I had to ask my brother to call on my behalf. The second time, my brother was not available to help me, so I made the call myself. I spoke with my worker and tried to ask my question, but I didn't understand the answer.

Before speaking with a lawyer at Greater Boston Legal Services, I didn't know that I could report my medical expenses in order to increase my food stamps. If there had been an interpreter, maybe my worker would have explained that rule to me.

Due to these communication problems, I requested that my case be transferred to a worker who speaks Spanish.
