

# Part 4

## Language Access

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### **20 What if you prefer to communicate in a language other than English?**

You are entitled to language assistance that will allow you to access documents and other communications in your language at every stage of the EA program.

Federal and state civil rights laws require EOHLC to make sure that EA families with limited English proficiency can access the EA program. You are considered limited English proficient if you do not speak, read, write or understand English very well, and prefer to communicate with EOHLC in your primary language. When you apply for EA, EOHLC should ask you which language you prefer to communicate in. If you are not asked, tell the worker if you prefer to communicate in a language other than English. EOHLC will have cards that allow you to point to your language. You will also be given a one-page sheet with language access information in other languages.

If you speak Spanish, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Amharic, Portuguese, or Cape Verdean Creole, you have the right to receive important EA documents in your language, such as application materials, shelter rules, and noncompliance and termination notices. (Please note that as of September 2023, not all of the important documents have been translated into Amharic and Cape Verdean Creole.) EOHLC will only translate the standardized portions of the documents into your language, which means any narrative portions will not be translated. You may ask EOHLC or shelter workers for interpretation of any untranslated portions of important documents.

All EA families have the right to free oral interpretation for important EA communications and documents no matter what language they speak. EOHLC will provide free oral interpretation in its field offices, central office, and Hearings Division. All EA shelters should provide free oral interpretation as well, either through staff that speak your language fluently or through a telephone interpreter service. If a EOHLC or shelter staff member is not available to connect you with an interpretation service, you may call EOHLC at (617) 573-1106 to access free, over-the-phone interpretation. If you do not speak a language listed in the recorded greeting, press one (1) for English and state the name of your language when someone answers the telephone. This phone number is also listed on a notice in 25 languages that should be attached to all important EA documents.

### ***Advocacy Tips:***

- ✓ EOHLC and shelter staff cannot ask your friends, family members, children, or other shelter residents to interpret, unless it is an emergency. You may ask for a professional interpreter even if you, a friend, or family member speaks some English.
- ✓ If your preferred language is one of the languages in which program documents are available and yet you still receive documents in English, tell a EOHLC or shelter staff member that you would like to receive documents in your language, and they must provide it to you in the translated language. Otherwise, you can let them know you would like the English document read to you in your preferred language.
- ✓ The Emergency Assistance Uniform Shelter Program Rules, Guidelines, and Forms; and the Language Access Complaint Form, are available in multiple languages on EOHLC's website at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/emergency-assistance-ea-family-shelter-resources-and-data#emergency-assistance-uniform-shelter-program-rules,-guidelines-and-forms->.

- ✓ EOHLC has a Language Access Plan with more detailed information about language services. The plan (together with exhibits), rules for EOHLC and shelter staff, and training materials, are available on EOHLC's website at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/language-assistance?auHash=KCI312A-Nc7ydbNd7YA6xEPYbuujV4Mk8NVluXWav4U#-ea-language-access-plan->.
- ✓ EOHLC has a Language Access Coordinator who can answer any questions and resolve issues related to language services. You may file a language access complaint with the Language Access Coordinator. The Language Access Complaint Procedure is available in Arabic, Cape Verdean Creole, Haitian Creole, Portuguese and Spanish on EOHLC's website at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/emergency-assistance-ea-family-shelter-resources-and-data>.
- ✓ If you have informed EOHLC of your language preference and you are not provided information orally in your language (or in writing if your language is Spanish, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Amharic, Portuguese or Cape Verdean Creole), you can contact the Statewide Language Access Attorney at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute: 617-357-0700.