



# Language Access Plan

Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman

Fiscal Years 2024 – 2027



Homeland  
Security

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## Introduction

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The Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman (CIS Ombudsman) helps individuals and employers in resolving problems with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). To fulfill its mission, the CIS Ombudsman regularly interacts with the public through its casework services, public engagements, and policy work.

In fiscal year (FY) 2023, the CIS Ombudsman:

- Received 23,591 case assistance requests from individuals and employers and communicated with them via email, mail, and phone.
- Engaged with 4,952 stakeholders through 132 meetings, webinars, conferences, and other outreach events.
- Distributed 36 stakeholder messages to a listserv of more than 138,000 subscribers.
- Had over 943,188 pageviews of CIS Ombudsman web pages.<sup>1</sup>

We also established a social media presence with Facebook and LinkedIn accounts in FY 2022 and with X (formerly known as Twitter) in FY 2023.

## Who We Serve

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Our office serves individuals and employers who interact with USCIS, as well as attorneys and legal representatives. We also interact with stakeholders across the country and regularly communicate—both formally and informally—with USCIS leadership and offices. Every year, on June 30, we also issue an Annual Report to Congress.

### General U.S. immigration demographics

Naturally, our customer base often reflects the demographics of USCIS customers and national immigration trends. From 2018 through 2020, the top three countries of origin for immigrants to the U.S. were Mexico, India, and China.<sup>2</sup> According to 2022 DHS statistics,<sup>3</sup> the top 10 countries of birth of people who obtained lawful permanent resident status in FY 2022 were:

- |                               |                        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mexico (12.84%)            | 6. Philippines (3.53%) |
| 2. India (12.47%)             | 7. El Salvador (3.03%) |
| 3. China (6.67%)              | 8. Vietnam (2.40%)     |
| 4. Dominican Republic (3.94%) | 9. Brazil (2.37%)      |
| 5. Cuba (3.60%)               | 10. Colombia (2.13%)   |

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<sup>1</sup> In July 2023, Google Analytics replaced Universal Analytics (UA) with Google Analytics 4 (GA4), which measures pageviews differently, causing a drop in pageviews across most webpages from June 2023 to July 2023. More information is available on Google's [\[UA→GA4\] Comparing metrics: Google Analytics 4 vs. Universal Analytics](#) page.

<sup>2</sup> [Key findings about U.S. immigrants | Pew Research Center](#) (August 20, 2020; accessed December 12, 2023); [Program: U.S. Immigration Trends | migrationpolicy.org](#) (accessed December 12, 2023); [Immigrants in the United States | American Immigration Council](#) (September 21, 2021; accessed December 12, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> [Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2022 | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#) (accessed December 12, 2023).

According to Pew Research, in 2018, only 53% of immigrants were proficient in English, and the top five languages spoken at home were Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Filipino/Tagalog, and French.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, the Migration Policy Institute estimated that individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) made up 8.2% of the U.S. population.<sup>5</sup> The American Immigration Council also estimated that one-third had a college degree and one quarter had less than a high school diploma.<sup>6</sup>

## Demographics from our case assistance requests

We evaluated the data from our case assistance requests for FY 2020 through FY 2023 for the country of birth of those requesting case assistance from our office. Between FY 2020 through FY 2022, India was the top country of birth, followed by Mexico. China, Venezuela, Nigeria, El Salvador, Brazil, Korea, Honduras, Guatemala, Iran, and the Philippines filled in the rest of the top 10 for at least one of the last three fiscal years.<sup>7</sup>

While we anticipate that many of these top countries will likely remain the same, trends can change unexpectedly due to world events.

FY 2023 is a prime example of how world events can affect the demographics of those we serve. Haiti was the top country of birth associated with our case assistance requests, followed by Mexico, India, China, Venezuela, Brazil, Nigeria, El Salvador, and Honduras. A rise in requests landed Cuba in the top 10 for the first time in four years.<sup>8</sup>

We also looked at how many people had a legal representative attached to their case assistance request. In FY 2020, around 39% had a legal representative; in FY 2021, that number dropped to around 33%; in FY 2022, it jumped to about 44% of requestors having a legal representative. Then in FY 2023, the number dropped down to 29%.<sup>9</sup> These numbers suggest that around two out of three people seeking our assistance in the last few years do not have an attorney or legal representative helping them.

<sup>4</sup> [Immigrants in America: Key Charts and Facts | Pew Research Center](#) (accessed December 12, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/datahub/MPI-Data-Hub\\_LEP-Population\\_US-States\\_1990-2019.xlsx](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/datahub/MPI-Data-Hub_LEP-Population_US-States_1990-2019.xlsx).

<sup>6</sup> [Immigrants in the United States | American Immigration Council](#) (accessed December 12, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> From FY 2020 through FY 2023, the top ten countries of birth represented in our case assistance requests were:

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
1	India	India	India	Haiti
2	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico
3	China	China	Venezuela	India
4	Nigeria	Nigeria	China	China
5	El Salvador	El Salvador	Nigeria	Venezuela
6	Brazil	Brazil	Brazil	Brazil
7	Honduras	Venezuela	El Salvador	Nigeria
8	Unknown	Korea	Honduras	El Salvador
9	Korea	Honduras	Guatemala	Honduras
10	Philippines	Guatemala	Iran	Cuba

<sup>8</sup> See chart above.

<sup>9</sup> We reviewed data in our internal case management system, CAADI. In FY 2020, we received a total of 11,880 requests; 4,635 of them had a G-28 or attorney information associated with the request. In FY 2021, we received 24,443 requests; 7,993 had a G-28 or attorney information. In FY 2022, we received 29,409 requests and 13,007 had a G-28 or attorney information. In FY 2023, we received 23,591 requests and 6,835 had a G-28 or attorney information.

# Language Access Policy

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The CIS Ombudsman confirms its commitment to following the DHS Policy on Language Access:

It is the policy of DHS to provide meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency to operations, services, activities, and programs that support each Homeland Security mission area by providing quality language assistance services in a timely manner. DHS Components, therefore, should incorporate language access considerations into their routine strategic and business planning, identify and translate vital documents into the most frequently encountered languages, provide interpretive services where appropriate, and educate personnel about language access responsibilities and how to utilize available language access resources. The DHS Recipient Guidance and other federal agency guidance on language access for individuals who are LEP include a four-factor analysis that assists in assessing meaningful access. These factors are the:

1. Number or proportion of individuals who are LEP encountered or likely to be encountered;
2. Frequency of contact with individuals who are LEP;
3. Nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided; and
4. Resources available and costs to provide the meaningful access.

The provision of meaningful access often begins with this assessment but must be accomplished by taking proactive steps, including providing (1) the necessary language assistance services; (2) training to staff on policies and procedures; and (3) notice to external stakeholders, translated into multiple languages, of no-cost language assistance services.

Regardless of the frequency or number of contacts with populations speaking a certain language, in matters related to rights, safety, and health, DHS Components must translate corresponding vital documents, or vital information found in the document, into the primary language of a person who is LEP or obtain a qualified interpreter to communicate all of the vital information in the document. Further, minors may not be used for providing language services in DHS Component programs and activities except in rare circumstances (e.g., exigent circumstances involving life and safety and only until such time as a qualified interpreter or translator can be secured).

DHS Components should follow federal Section 508 accessibility and plain language guidelines when developing materials that are intended for the public. The use of plain language enhances accessibility and understanding for persons who speak English and helps to ensure that translated materials convey information in a clear and concise manner.<sup>10</sup>

All CIS Ombudsman employees and contractors are covered by this plan.

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<sup>10</sup> See the list of Key Terms in the [DHS Language Access Plan](#) published in November 2023.

## Oversight and Responsible Staff

A language access coordinator in the CIS Ombudsman’s Strategy Division is responsible for ensuring that our office implements this language access plan. CIS Ombudsman management—which consists of the chiefs from each division in the office or a staff member that they select to represent their division—will identify which staff members in their division will be the appropriate point of contact for implementing the plan together with the language access coordinator.

Two key duties of the language access coordinator are to:

- Schedule and manage two checkpoints per fiscal year to assess the office’s progress towards implementing this plan. Staff members responsible for implementing portions of the plan will meet more frequently, as needed.
- Set up one training per fiscal year for CIS Ombudsman staff that will help the office improve how it provides meaningful language access to our customers.

See Appendix A in [DHS’s Language Access Plan \(November 2023\)](#) for a full list of the language access coordinator’s duties.

## CIS Ombudsman Approach to Language Access

### **Prioritizing languages based on our customer base**

With 29,409 case assistance requests in FY 2022 and 23,591 in FY 2023, our casework represents the bulk of the office’s interaction with the public and with LEP speakers. The top countries of birth for the past three fiscal years have consistently been India and Mexico, followed by China or Venezuela. Since we have not received any emails in Hindi,<sup>11</sup> we will prioritize Spanish and Mandarin Chinese when seeking translation and interpretation services.

The office has implemented the ability to track case assistance requests submitted in Spanish. The office will also determine what new processes we may need staff to follow and how to update our case management system to best track calls, emails, and requests that indicate a need for translation or interpretation. The new processes will also consider how to capture the data from our tracking efforts.

The office has implemented the ability to track case assistance requests submitted in Spanish. The office will also determine what new processes we may need staff to follow and how to update our case management system to best track calls, emails, and requests that indicate a need for translation or interpretation. The new processes will also consider how to capture the data from our tracking efforts.

### **Responding to sudden changes in demographics**

We will continue to track language requests of customers who call, email, or submit a case assistance request. As we provide more translations and meaningful language access options, it is possible that our customer base will change in response. World events and changes in immigration policy may also require us to prioritize new languages for translation. For example, DHS responded to different world events by implementing [Operation Allies Welcome](#), [Uniting for Ukraine](#), and the [processes for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans](#). We then experienced an increase in case assistance requests related to these programs.

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<sup>11</sup> The 2011 Census in India listed 121 languages being used in India. It found that around 57.1% of the population spoke Hindi and 10.6% spoke English. Rounding out the top five languages are Bengali (8.9%), Marathi (8.2%), and Telugu (7.8%).

See the Monitoring, Data Tracking, Timeframes, & Evaluation section below for more information on how we will track changes in our customer base.

## Taking digital literacy and usage into account

We will also take into consideration digital literacy when determining language access plans. When assessing language access needs, we will also take into account how easily the targeted population will be able to find and use the translated resources. The office will consider three main factors:

- **Internet usage:** Although most people in the U.S. have some sort of internet access, Pew Research reported that seven percent of the U.S. population said in 2021 that they did not use the internet.<sup>12</sup> Adults with less than a high school degree and who earn less than \$30,000 a year are more likely to report not using the internet.
- **Digital platform usage:** Pew Research reported in 2021 that 15% of people are smartphone dependent, including 28% of 18- to 29-year-olds and 25% of Hispanics who responded to the survey.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, differences in social media usage could impact what language access tools are needed when communicating with our audiences. For example, Pew Research reported a slightly lower usage of LinkedIn among Hispanic populations, and lower usage of Twitter (23% of all respondents) when compared to YouTube usage (81% of all respondents).<sup>14</sup> Immigrant populations also bring with them social media preferences from their countries of origin, with WhatsApp popular among African and Southeast Asian users, and WeChat widely used by Chinese speakers.<sup>15</sup>
- **Digital problem-solving skills:** Our audience's ability to navigate digital/online environments also matters. The 2017 Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies<sup>16</sup> found that 62% of adult survey respondents in the U.S. had Level 1<sup>17</sup> or lower skills in digital problem solving. This meant that they did not have the skills to navigate a simple webpage to exchange a desk lamp they mistakenly received for the correct desk lamp that they had ordered.<sup>18</sup>

## Language services and technologies

### *Translation and interpretation services*

Our office currently uses an interagency agreement with the U.S. Department of State's Office of Language Services to obtain translations for our materials. In FY 2024, we will continue to explore language services and technologies—such as DHS's Language Services Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) and USCIS' Language Services Section (LSS)—to expand the types of language access resources we can offer. We will also explore alternatives

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<sup>12</sup> [7% of Americans don't use the internet. Who are they? | Pew Research Center](#) (April 2, 2021; accessed March 24, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> [Demographics of Internet and Home Broadband Usage in the United States | Pew Research Center](#) (accessed March 24, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Although racial categories do not directly correlate to immigrant populations, this data can be considered broadly together with other information about language access and digital literacy and usage. LinkedIn had higher numbers of White (29%) and Black (27%) users than Hispanic users (19%). Twitter had about the same low percentage of users (22% to 29%) compared to YouTube (79% to 85%). The report did not include numbers for Asian users. [Demographics of Social Media Users and Adoption in the United States | Pew Research Center](#) (April 7, 2021; accessed March 24, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Other reported apps include VK in Europe, KaokaoTalk in South Korea, and Zalo in Vietnam. Hong, Y. A., Juon, H. S., & Chou, W. S. (2021). Social media apps used by immigrants in the United States: challenges and opportunities for public health research and practice. *mHealth*, 7, 52. <https://doi.org/10.21037/mhealth-20-133> (accessed March 24, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national\\_results.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/national_results.asp) (accessed March 24, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/measure.asp?section=3&sub\\_section=3](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/measure.asp?section=3&sub_section=3) (accessed March 24, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Slide 9, [https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Education%20and%20Skills\\_online%20sample%20items.ppt](https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/Education%20and%20Skills_online%20sample%20items.ppt) (accessed March 24, 2022).

such as recruiting detailees, accessing outside vendors, or using services available from other federal departments and agencies.

### ***Using technology***

Our office does not currently use any formal machine translation or translation technologies that rely on artificial intelligence. By the end of FY 2025, we will evaluate whether to use a translation technology. If we choose to do so, we will implement a process to put any machine-translated items through a quality assurance (QA) review. The QA review can be done by CIS Ombudsman staff (if they have the requisite language skills) or through our established translation services.

Additionally, in FY 2024, we will continue to use data analytics tools to assess our customer base and their language needs.

## **Projects, procedures, and protocols by division**

### ***Casework***

- **Translation for casework emails and requests:** Our office has translated six of our most frequently used email templates into Spanish, Mandarin, and Pashto and will explore how to get further translation services for our [cisombudsman@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:cisombudsman@hq.dhs.gov) email templates and case assistance request response templates. In FY 2024, we will also explore whether we can obtain translation services to help us review case assistance requests in Spanish and respond to emails sent in Spanish.
- **Interpretation for phone calls:** Our voicemail system is currently offered in English, and we are determining whether we can offer it in Spanish. In FY 2024, we will explore whether we can secure interpretation services for our public phoneline that could potentially be implemented in FY 2025. Currently, our office relies on casework volunteers with Spanish language skills to respond to callers in Spanish.
- **Translating DHS Form 7001:** We will start by translating the DHS Form 7001, *Request for Case Assistance*, and instructions into Spanish, Haitian Creole, Dari, Pashto, Ukrainian, and Mandarin Chinese by the end of FY 2025. We will post it as a courtesy on our webpage along with a clear label stating that the English version is the official version and that individuals must submit the English version, with responses written in English, to request case assistance. We will also update the applicable casework email templates to convey this message.
- **Providing notice when translation is not available:** When translation services are not available throughout the case assistance process, we will include language alerting the customer that the next step will be only in English.

### ***Public engagements and communications materials***

- **Stakeholder engagements in other languages:** If CIS Ombudsman staff have sufficient Spanish language skills, our office will conduct at least two engagements in Spanish per fiscal year. The office will continue to consider how to increase access to its stakeholder engagements to communities that are LEP.
- **Translations for communications materials:** The office will evaluate stakeholder messages, web content, and other CIS Ombudsman resources on a case-by-case basis to assess whether translation will be appropriate. If translation is appropriate, we will prioritize translation into the following 9 languages:
  - Arabic
  - Chinese (simplified Mandarin)
  - French
  - Haitian Creole



- Portuguese
  - Russian
  - Spanish
  - Somali
  - Vietnamese
  - With the possibility of also adding Pashto, Dari, Ukrainian, and other languages
- We are updating our standard office brochure, flyer, and poster in English to reflect current processes and new branding. We intend to translate these materials into the languages listed above by the end of FY 2024. If resources allow, we will translate our standard office presentation and script, three tip sheets, and an updated poster as well by the end of FY 2025.
  - We will post any translated materials on our public webpage and alert stakeholders of these new resources.
  - We will print our office brochure and flyer in English and Spanish to have them available for in-person conferences and sessions. We will also assess whether we need to convert any web content into printable materials that can easily be distributed by stakeholders to people with limited digital literacy.
  - *Translation for social media:* In FY 2024, the office will evaluate whether social media messages need to be translated and determine whether to add to our social media presence on other platforms in FY 2025.
  - *Providing non-written resources:* By the end of FY 2025, the office will evaluate whether and how to provide additional audio or video resources as a way to reach those with limited literacy skills. These may be audio or video versions of written materials or resources created specifically for audio or video formats.
  - *Providing notice when translation is not available:* When necessary, we will include language alerting the reader that an item is only available in English.

### *Policy*

- *Annual Report to Congress:* We will provide translated versions of an executive summary of the office's Annual Report to Congress in Spanish and Mandarin Chinese.
- *Email inbox:* The automated reply message will be translated into Spanish by the end of FY 2024 and inform the reader that policy materials will only be available in English, except for the executive summary of the Annual Report to Congress.

### *Operations*

- *Hiring:* Our office has used foreign language skills as a selective placement factor for a recent job posting and will continue to evaluate whether to add it to future job openings in the office.
- *Details:* By the end of FY 2025, we will explore the possibility of creating a detail opportunity to assist the office with in-language engagements or other functions. The office can also research new ways to expand the reach of our detail postings. For example, we can assess whether to create a liaison role between the CIS Ombudsman and USCIS to establish a permanent, regular way of recruiting qualified bilingual detailees from USCIS. We can also evaluate whether to participate in the DHS Rotation Program.
- *Staff training:* Our office will alert staff that training funds may be used for foreign language and interpretation/translation classes. The training funds available will depend on the yearly budget.

Our office will also continue to assist customers in overcoming potential language barriers as needed and will share information about free or pro bono translation resources in response to LEP inquiries when CIS Ombudsman translation services are unavailable.

### **Indigenous language efforts**

To align with DHS's [Indigenous Languages Plan](#) (February 2024), we will:

- Reach out to set up an engagement with at least one organization that serves indigenous language speakers by the end of FY 2025.
- Evaluate if and how to create audio or video resources in indigenous languages.
- When we engage with embassies, ask embassy staff about their indigenous language speaker communities and if they have resources they can recommend and/or share.

## **Current Resources in Other Languages**

The CIS Ombudsman currently provides the following resources in addition to the English versions:

- [Case Assistance Request Overview \(Spanish\)](#)
- [Overview of the CIS Ombudsman's Case Assistance Services \(Spanish\)](#)
- [How to Request Case Assistance from the Ombudsman infographic](#) (Arabic, Simplified Mandarin Chinese, Dari, French, Haitian Creole, Pashto, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese)
- [CIS Ombudsman trifold brochure](#) (Spanish, Simplified Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, French, Russian, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Somali, Ukrainian, Dari, and Pashto)
- [CIS Ombudsman poster](#) (Simplified Mandarin Chinese and Vietnamese)

Four of the [CIS Ombudsman Annual Reports to Congress](#) are also available in other languages:

- [2011 Annual Report to Congress \(Spanish\)](#)
- 2017 Annual Report to Congress Executive Summary ([Spanish](#) and [Chinese](#))
- [2022 Annual Report to Congress Executive Summary \(Spanish\)](#)
- [2023 Annual Report to Congress Executive Summary \(Spanish\)](#)

## **Employee Training and Duties**

### **Public notice and training**

We will post this plan on the office's general Microsoft Teams channel and disseminate it to all employees and contractors. The office will provide training on language access responsibilities to all staff. This annual internal training will cover the language access services currently available, how to identify a need for the services, and how to provide them to the public. As noted previously, staff will be able to use training funds (when available) to take foreign language and translation/interpretation classes.

New employees will also receive this plan as part of their onboarding training materials and receive training on language access responsibilities.

### **Employee duties**

Current CIS Ombudsman staff will be responsible for implementing elements of this plan as assigned by their supervisors. They will also be required to attend language access training sessions provided by the office. Staff will be encouraged to submit suggestions for improving language access processes and resources in the office and allowed time to join informal language conversational groups that may arise out of employee interest. The office currently offers a Spanish language conversational group where employees can practice their Spanish language skills.

### **Quality control procedures**

We will request that translation contractors and/or volunteers:

- Follow DHS style for consistent formatting and style;
- Use our Spanish word bank (once it is completed) to translate terms that are specific to our office;
- Use the preferred translations in USCIS' *Glossary of Spanish Terminology for USCIS (2016)* and [Glosario](#) page to ensure consistent translations in Spanish;
- Search [USCIS' Spanish website](#) and [multilingual resources](#) for immigration terms to see how USCIS has translated them and use those translations to help maintain consistency; and
- Conduct a quality assurance review of translations.

Our bilingual staff will also conduct quality assurance reviews on an ad-hoc basis.

## **Monitoring, Data Tracking, Timeframes, & Evaluation**

To monitor and evaluate our language access progress, we will conduct occasional internal checks to determine if casework trends and/or stakeholder feedback indicate that the office needs to obtain additional translation services. Our office will also review information from our internal case management system to assess whether the countries of birth reflected in our caseload have changed significantly and/or indicate that we should provide more resources in certain languages. Finally, we will also review DHS and USCIS statistics annually to learn about patterns in the immigration applications and petitions that USCIS receives.

We will also seek public feedback, both positive and negative, as part of our efforts to monitor language access. To begin, we will develop an external survey to collect feedback from our stakeholder network on language access needs.

We will also continue to improve how we enter and track data in our case management system to capture the foreign language needs of those seeking help from our office. We will analyze the data to capture demographic trends in the case assistance requests we receive and incorporate this analysis in decisions regarding translation, interpretation, and language access resources.

## **Notifying the Public**

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### **Notice to the public**

We will post this plan on our public webpage ([www.dhs.gov/cisombudsman](http://www.dhs.gov/cisombudsman)) in an accessible format that is Section 508 compliant.

### **Outreach to LEP communities**

Our office conducts extensive outreach throughout the year to a large stakeholder network through small stakeholder meetings, webinars, roundtable discussions, and conferences. We will seek feedback from our stakeholder network for the purpose of assessing our language services in all outreach activities. We will research and begin to engage in targeted outreach with stakeholders that represent communities that speak the top 10 languages in the U.S. in order to learn about their language access needs.

We regularly gather important information and feedback from stakeholders about needed improvements to our language services as well as those provided by USCIS. Information related to language access will be provided to stakeholders to inform them of our ongoing efforts to improve language services.

We encourage stakeholders to contact us about language access at [cisombudsman.publicaffairs@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:cisombudsman.publicaffairs@hq.dhs.gov).