



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
INDEPENDENT BUDGET OFFICE

110 WILLIAM STREET, 14<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10038  
(212) 442-0632 • FAX (212) 442-0350 • E MAIL: [ibo@ibo.nyc.ny.us](mailto:ibo@ibo.nyc.ny.us)  
<http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us>

April 24, 2007

Mr. Javier H. Valdés  
Communities for Housing Equity Coalition  
137-139 W. 25th Street, 12th Floor  
New York, NY 10001

**Subj: Fiscal Impact: “Equal Access to Housing Services Act”**

Dear Mr. Valdés:

In response to your request, the Independent Budget Office (IBO) has estimated the cost of the proposed Equal Access to Housing Services Act. We estimate that enactment of the proposed legislation as currently drafted would cost \$7.0 million on an annual basis, with additional one-time costs of \$375,000 in the first year of enactment.

Cost Estimate for Proposed “Equal Access to Housing Services” Act		
		Full-Time Positions
<b>Annual Costs</b>		
Housing Inspectors	\$ 5,255,768	88
Translators	1,752,250	29
<b>Total Annual Costs</b>	<b>\$ 7,008,018</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>One-Time Costs</b>	<b>\$ 375,000</b>	
SOURCES: IBO; Department of Housing Preservation and Development.		
NOTE: Costs include housing department personal services and other-than-personal-services spending, and fringe benefits costs from city central accounts.		

The proposed legislation would require the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to provide language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency. The draft legislation consists of four sections: language assistance services, translation of HPD documents, code enforcement, and reporting. Our estimate of the fiscal impact of the legislation is organized accordingly.

**Covered Languages.** The languages covered by the law would include the nine most commonly spoken languages other than English in each borough. We understand the law to require provision of language services only for the nine most common languages in that borough, not citywide. As a result, the total number of languages is greater than nine. Based on census

information provided by the City University of New York, the total number of covered languages would be 17 (see table on next page).

<b>Top 9 Languages by Borough and Estimated Number of Speakers</b>						
	<b>Brooklyn</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Manhattan</b>	<b>Queens</b>	<b>Staten Island</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Spanish	140,105	190,059	135,379	151,375	12,296	629,214
Russian	59,609	2,568	4,829	15,076	2,686	84,768
Chinese	24,975	1,638	21,709	34,111	1,529	83,962
Italian	23,181	9,404	8,424	20,501	8,255	69,765
French	14,038	3,682	18,118	10,188	-	46,026
Korean	-	-	4,244	20,356	1,187	25,787
Yiddish	22,169	1,434	-	-	-	23,603
Polish	13,553	-	-	8,806	1,022	23,381
French Creole	18,520	-	-	-	-	18,520
Greek	-	-	-	15,611	-	15,611
Hebrew	8,983	-	5,003	-	-	13,986
Tagalog	-	-	-	8,606	1,557	10,163
German	-	1,467	8,527	-	-	9,994
Japanese	-	-	7,248	-	-	7,248
Kru, Ibu, Yoruba	-	4,577	-	-	921	5,498
Arabic	-	-	-	-	1,477	1,477
Bengali	-	1,451	-	-	-	1,451
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>325,133</b>	<b>216,280</b>	<b>213,481</b>	<b>284,630</b>	<b>30,930</b>	<b>1,070,454</b>

SOURCES: CUNY Center for Urban Research; New York Immigration Coalition.

**Language Assistance Services.** The draft legislation would require HPD to:

- Provide “prompt” language assistance services in all interactions between HPD and its contractors and HPD’s clients, including interpretation of forms (§ 8-1203.a-c);
- Permit clients to complete forms in their primary language (§ 8-1203.d);
- Provide translation services for covered languages at public meetings, trainings, or events (§ 8-1203.d).

IBO estimates that meeting the requirement for translation at HPD meetings and presentations, and the provision to allow clients to complete forms in their primary language, would require the addition of a minimum of 24 full-time translators and five support staff, including two new positions for the creative team for brochure design, at an annual cost of \$1.8 million, including salaries, fringe benefits and other-than-personal-services (OTPS) costs. We used an average salary of \$45,000 for translators based on average salaries of interpreter/translator positions in other city agencies. We assumed that each language would have one full-time translator except for the more widely-spoken languages of Spanish (five positions), Russian (two), and Chinese (three).

Translators would be responsible for translating applications for Section 8, Senior Citizen’s Rent Increase Exemption benefits, and HPD’s Housing Assistance Program back into English when the client chooses to complete it in his or her primary language as allowed under the proposed legislation. HPD estimates that it receives 12,400 pages of documents annually and that approximately 20 percent, or 2,480 documents, would be completed in a language other than English.

Translators would also be responsible for attending any of the 5,400 meetings that HPD conducts with the public where attendees require language assistance. According to HPD, the different types of meetings it conducts have different language assistance needs, but overall it estimates that 20 percent of its meetings—about 1,080 annually—would require translation services. Finally, translators would also work with the creative team to publish new brochures in all 17 languages as well as monitor HPD’s Web site to ensure that the content is maintained accurately.

*Alternatives.* Based on the volume of correspondence, IBO estimates that some languages would have a low volume of documents to be translated. This could make having a full-time translator inefficient. We considered two possible alternatives for languages with low volume.

The first option would be to use part-time employees for low-volume languages. Based on the language distributions above, we assumed one full-time employee per borough where there were more than 100,000 speakers of a language; one half-time employee per borough where there were between 30,000 and 100,000 speakers, and a one-day-a-week equivalent employee where there were fewer than 30,000 speakers per borough. This resulted in about 13 full-time equivalent employees, plus three full-time support staff. Annual costs were estimated to be about \$850,000. (Note that only employees who work half-time or more are eligible to receive benefits).

A second option would be to use outside contractors for translation. At a cost of \$250 per document, and \$200 per meeting, the total cost of this option would be \$830,000 per year.

Either of these two options, however, would likely result in longer processing times. Since the draft legislation requires “prompt” language assistance services and that limited English-proficient clients “do not have to wait unreasonably longer to receive assistance” than English-proficient individuals, these might not prove to be feasible options.

***Translation of Documents.*** The draft legislation would require HPD to:

- Translate all HPD documents into covered languages (§ 8-1204.a);
- Develop written materials (poster and pamphlet) in covered languages explaining services, which owners of multiple dwellings will post and distribute to current and prospective tenants (§ 8-1204.b-c);
- Place posters in public spaces (§ 8-1204.e)

HPD currently has a three-year contract for \$100,000 for document translation. Some documents and other language content (such as the HPD Web site) are already translated into Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Creole, and Russian. To translate all documents into the covered languages, the department would need to increase current efforts. IBO estimates that translating all documents into the covered languages and creating a pamphlet and poster to be distributed to all multiple dwellings will have a one-time fiscal impact of approximately \$375,000, including \$250,000 to translate remaining documents and other content (such as HPD’s Web site), and \$125,000 to develop a poster and pamphlet and mail them to owners and managers of all multiple dwellings in the city.

***Housing Inspectors.*** The draft legislation would require HPD to:

- Provide code enforcement services by bilingual housing inspectors in covered languages (Housing Inspectors – a)
- Conduct all oral and written communication in primary language for covered languages (Housing Inspectors – b)

IBO estimates that the requirement to provide bilingual housing inspectors would require the addition of approximately 79 new inspectors and nine support staff at an estimated annual cost of approximately \$5.3 million.

Although HPD currently uses the city contract with the company Language Lines to provide translation services during housing inspections, the draft law would require HPD to determine the primary language of the client it is to serve and send an inspector with proficiency in that language to conduct the inspection. To meet the requirements of the law, IBO determined that HPD would need one housing inspector for each of the nine top languages in each borough available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in order to be able to respond to emergency “class C” violations. Assuming four shifts per week per inspector, HPD would need 180 bilingual housing inspectors. Based on information from HPD, there are currently 254 bilingual housing inspectors. For the purposes of the analysis, we assumed that these inspectors would be able to pass certification in those languages. Even so, the current inspectors would not meet language assistance needs as stipulated in the proposed legislation without additional staff, because there are insufficient numbers to provide 24/7 coverage in all covered languages. Also, some of the languages spoken by current housing inspectors are not among the covered languages. By subtraction, the net new need would be 79 new bilingual inspectors.

IBO used an average salary estimate for housing inspectors and associate housing inspectors based on the 2008 Preliminary Budget. We factored in a fringe benefit rate of 35 percent, and assumed that for every nine inspectors, HPD would need one support staff position. We did not include any salary adjustments for bilingual proficiency because the current labor contracts with the city do not call for salary differential when demonstrating language abilities and using them as part of job responsibilities.

Although our analysis indicates the need for the addition of new housing inspectors and support staff and an increased budget to meet the requirements of the law, over time it may be possible to replace existing inspectors through attrition with staff with the required language capabilities. The Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) allows language abilities to be a preferred skill on a job announcement, which can move an applicant up the list of potential job candidates. DCAS also administers tests to verify language capabilities. This could allow HPD to provide the bilingual staff with close to the current number of inspectors. It was noted during our analysis, however, that filling housing inspector vacancies is already difficult since the position requires five years of contracting experience. Finding qualified candidates with language capabilities in all covered languages may prove difficult.

The second provision in this section calls for all written and oral correspondence to be conducted in the client’s primary language. Since written correspondence is conducted with form letters, these letters would only need to be translated once with the rest of the department’s documents.

We assumed that follow-up oral communication with clients can be met through the department's contract with Language Lines or by using translators hired as part of the Language Assistance Services provision.

**Reporting.** The draft legislation (§ 8-1207) would require HPD to report annually on the usage of its services by limited English proficient clients and the agency resources dedicated to providing these clients with language assistance. We assumed that this provision would be met using existing agency resources.

### **Other Considerations**

**Savings.** It was suggested to us that implementation of the proposed legislation could result in fewer lawsuits against HPD for violation of Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of English-language proficiency, thereby generating offsetting savings. Since there are no known Title VI lawsuits against HPD in the recent past, IBO does not believe this will generate any measurable cost savings.

**Induced Demand for Housing Services.** If the draft proposed legislation were effective in its stated intent of providing greater access to housing services, it seems possible that the demand for HPD's programs and services could rise, particularly in the areas of code enforcement and program applications. We were unable to estimate what the magnitude of any such increase might be.

I hope you will find this information to be helpful. We would be happy to provide further details of our analysis upon request. The IBO staff contact is Brendan Cheney. Please do not hesitate to let me know if we can provide further assistance on this or other matters.

Sincerely,



C. Preston Niblack  
Deputy Director

Cc: J. Warren, HPD