



**STATE WATER  
RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD**

# **LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY**

**Adopted December 1, 2025 | Effective January 12, 2026**



**State of California**

Gavin Newsom, Governor

**California Environmental Protection Agency**

Yana Garcia, Secretary

**State Water Resources Control Board**

1001 I Street

Sacramento, CA 95814

<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov>

E. Joaquin Esquivel, Board Chair

Dorene D'Adamo, Vice Chair

Sean Maguire, Member

Laurel Firestone, Member

Nichole Morgan, Member

Eric Oppenheimer, Executive Director

Erik Ekdahl, Chief Deputy Director

Karen Mogus, Chief Deputy Director

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I</b>	<b>  POLICY STATEMENT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>II</b>	<b>  DEFINITIONS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>III</b>	<b>  AUTHORITY .....</b>	<b>9</b>
	A   Federal Laws .....	9
	B   Federal Regulations.....	9
	C   California Laws and Directives.....	9
	D   California Water Boards Resolutions.....	10
<b>IV</b>	<b>  APPLICABILITY, ROLES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES .....</b>	<b>11</b>
	A   Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs (OPEETA).....	11
	B   Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEOO).....	12
	C   Division of Administrative Services (DAS).....	12
	D   Leadership of State and Regional Water Boards .....	12
	E   All Water Boards Staff .....	13
	F   Bilingual Certified Employees.....	13
	G   Professional Language Services Providers .....	13
<b>V</b>	<b>  GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND EXPECTATIONS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
	A   Provision of Language Services .....	14
	B   Assessment and Planning .....	14
	C   Agendas and Public Notices.....	14
	D   Document Translation.....	15
	E   Interpretation .....	16
<b>VI</b>	<b>  PUBLIC REQUESTS FOR LANGUAGE SERVICES .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>VII</b>	<b>  PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>VIII</b>	<b>  EXTERNAL COMPLAINT OPTIONS .....</b>	<b>22</b>

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

IX		CONFIDENTIALITY .....	24
X		RETALIATION PROHIBITED .....	24
XI		REQUESTING ALTERNATIVE FORMATS .....	24
XII		DISCLAIMER .....	25
XIII		POINT OF CONTACT .....	25

# I | POLICY STATEMENT

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (Regional Water Boards), collectively referred to as the California Water Boards, are committed to ensuring that all members of the public—including individuals with limited English proficiency, individuals with disabilities, and members of protected classes—have full and equal access to the information, programs, activities, services, benefits, facilities, and employment opportunities administered by the California Water Boards. This includes ensuring meaningful communication with individuals who have limited English proficiency or other communication needs. As recipients of federal financial assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), the California Water Boards are mandated, under [Title VI of the Civil Rights Act](#) and [US EPA Title VI regulations and guidance](#), to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to California Water Boards programs and activities for individuals with limited English proficiency.

The California Water Boards do not discriminate and are committed to advancing equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Language access is a legal right protected by both state and federal laws. Ensuring effective communication is essential to upholding the public's right to participate in the processes, programs, and services of the California Water Boards. The California Water Boards recognize that members of the public have the right to understand and be understood when engaging with government.

This Language Access Policy (Policy) establishes the California Water Boards' expectations and responsibilities for providing language services, including translation and interpretation, as well as communication services for individuals with visual or hearing impairments. This Policy is a critical part of ensuring that all members of the public—regardless of their English proficiency or communication needs—have equal and meaningful opportunities to fully participate in decision-making processes affecting California's water resources.

The California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to provide the following language services free-of-charge and as appropriate and necessary:

- **Translation of vital documents**
- **Oral interpretation services**
- **Real-time interpretation over the phone**
- **Direct customer service and engagement with bilingual staff**
- **Assistive communication services:**
  - American Sign Language interpretation
  - Real-time captioning (CART services)
  - Alternative format vital documents (e.g., Braille, large print)
  - TTY/TDD phone services for individuals with hearing impairments.

Meaningfully engaging with communities in the languages they speak and understand ensures that collaboration and input from all Californians contributes to better decisions and policies that protect the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses.

## II | DEFINITIONS

For this Language Access Policy, the following terms are defined below:

**Assistive Communications Services:** Tools, devices, and services that ensure effective communication for individuals with hearing, speech, or vision impairments, including: American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART), telecommunication relay services (TTY/TDD), Braille, large print materials, and assistive listening devices.<sup>1</sup>

**Bilingual Pay Differential:** A monthly pay differential granted to a certified bilingual employee who is in a certified bilingual position.<sup>2</sup>

**Certified Bilingual Employee:** An employee who has successfully participated in an Oral Fluency Examination and is in a designated bilingual position.<sup>3</sup>

**Certified Bilingual Position:** A position where the employee uses bilingual skills on a continuous basis and averages 10% or more of total staff time.<sup>2</sup>

**Complainant:** Individual(s) or other interested parties filing a complaint under this Policy.<sup>4</sup>

**Deaf Interpreters:** Deaf Interpreters are deaf or hard of hearing and possess native or near-native fluency in American Sign Language, as well as extensive knowledge and understanding of deafness, the deaf community, and/or deaf culture. Deaf Interpreters may be used as a part of an interpreting team that includes hearing interpreters.<sup>5</sup>

**Four-Factor Analysis:** The Four-Factor Analysis is a federal legal framework under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act that helps agencies determine the level of language assistance needed and identify reasonable steps to ensure language access. Four-Factor Analysis assesses: (1) the number of limited English proficiency individuals served, (2) how often they interact with the agency, (3) the importance of the service, and (4) available resources and costs.

**Limited English Proficient (LEP) Individuals:** Individuals whose primary or home language is not English and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English can be limited English proficient, or "LEP." Limited English proficient individuals may be proficient in certain aspects of English communication (e.g., speaking) but still have limited proficiency in other areas (e.g., reading or writing).<sup>6</sup>

**Linguistic Isolation:** A household where all people aged 14 or older speak a language other than English and none speaks English "very well."<sup>7</sup>

**Meaningful Access and Communication:** Ensuring timely, accurate, and effective language assistance at no cost for limited English proficient (LEP) individuals or individuals with assistive communication needs so they can access services, programs, and benefits at a level equivalent to English-proficient individuals. Agencies must take reasonable steps to prevent delays, restrictions, or inferior quality in communication.

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

**Oral Interpretation:** The process of listening to communication in one language (source language) and converting it orally into another language (target language) while accurately conveying the meaning from one language into another in a culturally appropriate manner, mindful of the setting in which services are being rendered. Oral interpretation services occur in three modes:<sup>5</sup>

- **Simultaneous Interpreting:** Using technical equipment, the interpreter speaks at the same time as the primary speaker.
- **Consecutive Interpreting:** The interpreter speaks during pauses in the primary speaker's message.
- **Sight Interpreting:** The interpreter provides an oral rendition of a written document.

**Professional Interpreter:** A professional who interprets spoken communication from one language into another with accuracy and impartiality, ensuring that both the meaning and tone are preserved. Interpreters must meet the Credentialed Interpreter Standards of American Translators Association. Interpreters for state adjudicative proceedings must be contracted from the California Department of Human Resources Administrative Hearing and Medical Interpreter List or from the state Court Interpreters Program.

**Professional Sign Language Interpreter:** A professional who interprets signed communication into spoken language and vice versa, ensuring accurate and impartial translation of both content and context. Must possess a current and valid certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) at the level of Certificate of Interpretation (CI), Certificate of Transliteration (CT), or CI and CT (Certificate of Interpretation and Certificate of Transliteration); or must have a current and valid membership with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) at the Level of Generalist (III), Advanced (Level IV), or Master (Level V).

**Professional Translator:** A professional who translates written text from one language to another with accuracy and clarity, ensuring that the meaning, tone, and context are preserved. Must hold a certification through the American Translators Association (ATA)/pass same level test, or a bachelor's degree in translation and interpretation from an ATA-approved school.

**Retaliation:** To intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual or group, either:

- **For the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege guaranteed by state and federal laws**
- **Because individual has filed a complaint or has testified, assisted, or participated in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing under this Policy, or has opposed any practice made unlawful by the state and federal laws incorporated in this Policy.**

**Sign Language Interpretation:** The process of translating spoken language into sign language and vice versa, enables effective communication between individuals who use sign language and those who do not. Sign language interpretation involves translating verbal communication into visual and gestural language for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, while retaining the meaning and context of the original message.<sup>5</sup>

- **Simultaneous Interpreting:** The rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language while the speaker or signer continues to speak or sign.
- **Consecutive Interpreting:** The rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language while the speaker or signer pauses to allow interpreting.

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

- **Sight Translation:** The rendering of a written document directly into a spoken or signed language, for immediate understanding, but not for purposes of producing a written translated document.

**Sign Language Interpreters:** Sign language interpreters facilitate communication between signed and spoken languages (such as American Sign Language or Indo-Pakistani Sign Language.) Interpreters must be able to accurately convey the meaning from one language into another in a culturally appropriate manner, mindful of the setting in which they are rendering their services.<sup>5</sup>

**Sufficient Number of Qualified Bilingual Employees:** The number of qualified bilingual staff required to provide the same level of services to limited English proficient individuals as is available to English-speaking individuals seeking the same services.

**Substantial Number of Non- or Limited English-Speaking People:** A group of individuals who either do not speak English or who are unable to effectively communicate in English because it is not their primary language, and who comprise 5% or more of the people served statewide by any local office or facility of a state agency.

**Target Language:** The language into which a text or spoken content is being translated. It is the language that the translator or interpreter aims to produce, ensuring that the original message is conveyed accurately and appropriately to the intended audience.

**Threshold Language:** Any non-English language spoken by at least 5% of the population served, requiring translation of vital documents and other language access measures.

**Translation:** The process of transferring ideas expressed in words, phrases, or text in one language (source language) with equivalent words, phrases, or text in another language (target language). A professional translation retains the context, meaning, tone, and intent of the original document, as well as the author's writing style.<sup>8</sup>

**Vital Documents:** Paper or electronic material that is critical for access to the agency's programs, activities, and services, or contains information about procedures or processes required by law. Classification of a document as "vital" depends on the importance of the program, information, encounter, or service involved, and the consequence to the LEP individual if the information in question is not provided accurately and in a timely manner.<sup>9</sup>

1 For a detailed description of aids and services, see [ADA Requirements: Effective Communication | ADA.gov](#), "Auxiliary Aids and Services" section.

2 See [CalHR Manual](#), 1003 – Bilingual Services, "Bilingual Position Designation" section.

3 See [CalHR Manual](#), 1003 – Bilingual Services, "Language Proficiency Scoring – Bilingual Position Qualification" section.

4 See [Complaint Process | CRD](#) page for State of California Civil Rights Department Definition

5 See [Translator & Interpreter Descriptions \(3.5.16.\)](#)

6 See, [Commonly Asked Questions and Answers: Regarding Limited English Proficient \(LEP\) Individuals](#), Page 1.

7 See, [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) About Language Use](#), United States Census Bureau (12/16/21).

8 See, "[Civil Rights Division | On Choosing a Language Access Provider](#)"

9 For an expanded definition of Vital Documents please see, [707-What is a vital document? | HHS.gov](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015)



## III | AUTHORITY

State and federal laws guarantee the public's right to equal access to government services, information, fair treatment, and meaningful involvement. This Language Access Policy is guided by those laws and the regulations that implement them, as well as related Water Boards resolutions.

### A | FEDERAL LAWS

1. **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act:** Prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in programs receiving federal financial assistance.
2. **Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act:** Prohibits state and local agencies from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. Agencies must ensure that communication with individuals with disabilities is as effective as communication with others, including providing accessible formats and assistance when needed.

### B | FEDERAL REGULATIONS

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): The Code of Federal Regulations is the official compilation of rules promulgated by federal agencies to implement federal laws. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) enforces protections through:

1. **40 C.F.R. Part 7:** Implements Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Section 13 of the Clean Water Act—to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in programs or activities receiving US EPA funding.

### C | CALIFORNIA LAWS AND DIRECTIVES

1. **Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act (California Government Code, Sections 7290-7299.8):** California state agencies must provide translated materials and bilingual staff when 5% or more of the public served speaks a non-English language. Agencies must also conduct biennial language surveys to assess and address language needs and ensure a sufficient number of certified bilingual staff are available.
2. **California Government Code, Section 6219:** State agencies must use plain language principles to ensure clarity and readability in official communications, including regulations, announcements, and manuals.
3. **California Government Code, Section 11135:** Prohibits discrimination based on, among other classes, race, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and disability in any program or activity that is conducted, administered, or funded directly or indirectly by the State of California.
4. **California Water Code, Sections 13167.6 and 13228.14(d):** State and regional water boards must translate board meeting agendas into Spanish and may provide translations in other languages as needed.

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

5. **California Water Code, Section 13307.5(a):** Regional water boards must notify affected property owners, residents, and occupants about site cleanup proposals in English and any other languages commonly spoken in the area.
6. **Executive Order N-16-22, Advancing Equity:** Directs California state agencies to embed equity, inclusion, and accessibility into their operations, policies, and strategic planning. The order emphasizes reducing disparities, enhancing public engagement, and ensuring equitable access to government services and benefits.

## D | CALIFORNIA WATER BOARDS RESOLUTIONS

The State Water Board and several Regional Water Boards have adopted resolutions affirming their commitment to equity, environmental justice, nondiscrimination, and inclusive public participation. These resolutions strengthen the Water Boards' commitment to ensuring equal access to information, services, and decision-making processes.

1. State Water Resources Control Board [2021 Resolution](#)
2. San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board [2021 Practical Vision](#)
3. Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board [2022 Resolution](#)
4. North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board [2023 Resolution](#)
5. Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board [2023 Resolution](#)
6. Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board [2024 Resolution](#)
7. Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board [2024 Resolution](#)

## **IV | APPLICABILITY, ROLES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

This Language Access Policy applies to all California Water Boards staff and to services, programs, and activities provided to the public. It ensures that California Water Boards staff incorporate language access considerations into planning, communication, and delivery of services.

The following are roles and responsibilities for each respective group implementing this Language Access Policy.

### **A | OFFICE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, EQUITY, AND TRIBAL AFFAIRS (OPEETA)**

1. Serve as the California Water Boards' Language Access Coordinator and lead entity for implementing this Policy and related guidance.
2. Provide training, guidance, and technical assistance to all California Water Boards regions, divisions, and offices on language access obligations and best practices.
3. Fulfill reasonable requests for language services.
4. Oversee and manage contracts for professional translation and interpretation services.
5. Maintain an internal log of language access requests and services provided.
6. Receive and respond to language access-related complaints from the public and ensure timely and appropriate resolution of complaints, coordinating with relevant California Water Boards programs and leadership as necessary.
7. Maintain an internal log to track public language access complaints, responses, and trends to inform systemic improvements and compliance efforts.
8. Maintain discretion to deny a translation or interpretation request based on various criteria, including but not limited to:
  - The request lacks a verified language need.
  - The request is unreasonable or duplicative of existing translated materials.
  - The requested materials are incomplete.
  - The request is for a non-vital document.
  - The request lacks cultural humility or would be better delivered through an alternative communication method that is more effective, accessible, or aligned with community preferences.
  - The request is not intended for public distribution or is inappropriate for translation due to technical complexity, confidentiality, legal restrictions, or a high risk of miscommunication.
  - The request requires resources or costs that are unreasonable, unavailable, or excessive.
9. Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this Policy across all California Water Boards regions, divisions, and offices, identify areas for improvement, and report significant trends or concerns to executive leadership.

### **B | EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY OFFICE (EEOO)**

1. Coordinate and conduct the biennial language survey as required by the Bilingual Services Act and the California Department of Human Resources.

### **C | DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES (DAS)**

1. Support California Water Boards supervisors in identifying and establishing certified bilingual positions.
2. Coordinate and schedule bilingual certification examinations.
3. Maintain an internal list of all bilingual-certified employees within the California Water Boards, including the following information:
  - Language certified
  - Type of certification (verbal, written, or both)
  - Date of certification
  - Position classification
  - Region, division, or office
4. Maintain an internal list of all Water Boards employees receiving bilingual differential pay.

### **D | LEADERSHIP OF STATE AND REGIONAL WATER BOARDS**

1. Ensure staff are aware of and comply with this Policy.
2. Ensure new staff onboarding includes language access training and familiarization with this Policy.
3. Develop and implement internal processes for embedding language access into planning and operations.
4. Assess the language access needs for programs or projects offered as directed by this Policy.
5. Determine on an annual basis which program or project documents are considered vital documents and ensure translation into appropriate languages.
6. Participate in the biennial language survey to assess the number of public contacts engaging with the region, division, or office.
7. Determine if the region, division, or office has sufficient bilingual employees to provide the same level of service to limited English proficient individuals as is available to English-speaking individuals seeking services or information.

### E | ALL WATER BOARDS STAFF

1. Review and comply with the requirements of this Policy.
2. Participate in onboarding and training related to this Policy.
3. Coordinate with the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs to ensure timely and appropriate implementation of this Policy.
4. Promptly refer any public requests for language services or language access complaints directly to the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs.
5. Take prompt action when made aware of a situation that may require language access services or involve language access complaints.
6. Respect the privacy and dignity of individuals requesting services and maintain confidentiality as required by law.
7. Integrate language access planning into projects, programs, and public outreach.
8. Submit requests for translation and interpretation services in a timely manner.
9. Inform members of the public about the availability of language access services when appropriate and relevant.

### F | BILINGUAL CERTIFIED EMPLOYEES

1. Provide direct communication assistance and public outreach in certified languages.
2. Provide translation of short informational or outreach materials. Note: Bilingual Certified Employees do not provide translation of legal, technical, or regulatory materials.
3. Facilitate bilingual meetings and interpret informal interactions. Note: Bilingual Certified Employees do not interpret at board meetings or legal proceedings.
4. Retake bilingual certification examination every two years to maintain active certification status.

### G | PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE SERVICES PROVIDERS

1. Provide accurate, culturally competent, and neutral translation and interpretation services that faithfully convey both the content and tone of the original speaker or writer.
2. Utilize the California Water Boards preferred water terminology.
3. Maintain proficiency in interpretation tools, equipment, and technology for both virtual and in-person settings.
4. Ensure professional certifications and credentials are renewed and maintained in compliance with state and federal language access standards.
5. Adhere to all contract requirements, including timeliness, accuracy, and professional standards, as specified in the language services agreement.

## **V | GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND EXPECTATIONS**

This Language Access Policy and the associated guidance should be reviewed on an ongoing basis as needed to reflect the changing demographics and needs of communities served by the California Water Boards.

The California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to implement the following principles and expectations:

### **A | PROVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES**

1. Follow the procedural guidance established in this Language Access Policy and associated guidance.
2. Proactively respond to public requests for language services and promptly coordinate with the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs to fulfill requests.
3. Inform the public that language assistance services are available free of charge and that the California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to provide these services.
4. In offices where the public directly engages with front desk staff and the office is not shared with another agency, signage and notices about available language access services should be prominently displayed.
5. California Water Boards field staff or front desk staff who frequently interact with the public should carry language identification flashcards and be familiar with utilizing on-demand over-the-phone interpretation services.

### **B | ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING**

1. Assess language needs at the outset of projects, programs, and initiatives and develop outreach strategies to engage linguistically diverse communities.
2. Utilize the Four-Factor Analysis established by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to determine language service obligations for written translation and interpretation services:
  - Number or proportion of limited English proficient individuals eligible to be served.
  - Frequency of contact between limited English proficient individuals and California Water Board programs.
  - Nature and importance of the service, information, or program.
  - Resources available and costs to the California Water Boards for language access services.

### **C | AGENDAS AND PUBLIC NOTICES**

1. All State Water Board and Regional Water Board meeting agendas must be translated into Spanish.
2. All State Water Board and Regional Water Board meeting agendas should be translated into any language spoken by at least 5% of the population served who have limited English proficiency.

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

3. All State Water Board public notices should be translated into Spanish.
4. All State Water Board and Regional Water Board public notices should be translated into any language spoken by at least 5% of the affected population served who have limited English proficiency.
5. All State Water Board and Regional Water Board public notices must include a statement about the availability of language services. This statement should provide clear instructions on how the public can request interpretation services or the translation of materials, along with the deadline for submitting such requests.
6. All State Water Board and Regional Water Board meetings or staff workshops proactively offering interpretation services (i.e. without requiring advance requests from the public) should clearly indicate in the English-language version of the public notice: which languages will be offered, if services will only be available for a specific agenda item, and the approximate time of the agenda item (if possible).

## D | DOCUMENT TRANSLATION

1. All State Water Board and Regional Water Boards staff should identify vital documents for their respective region, division, or office on an annual basis.
2. All State Water Board and Regional Water Boards staff should translate vital documents into any language spoken by at least 5% of the population served by that Water Board region, division, or office who have limited English proficiency.
3. State Water Board staff should translate all vital documents into Spanish.
4. A translated executive summary may be provided in place of a full translation, if the summary contains enough information for an individual to understand the purpose, impact, and actions required.
5. All State Water Board and Regional Water Boards staff should utilize plain language to make content more accessible for individuals at all levels of English proficiency. Visual representation, such as images and infographics, may also be provided to make content more accessible.
6. All State Water Board and Regional Water Boards staff should consider cultural norms and differences when developing and designing content in ways that reflect the communication preferences of linguistically diverse communities.
7. All State Water Board and Regional Water Boards staff should consider and use an alternative form of language assistance other than translation when the alternative would be more effective or practical, such as radio announcements.
8. Efforts should be made to release translated materials at the same time as the English materials. However, in an emergency, information may be communicated immediately in English with translated versions provided as soon as they become available.
9. Translations are provided to assist individuals with limited English proficiency. In the case of any discrepancies between a translation and the original English-language content, the original English-language content will take precedence.



### E | INTERPRETATION

1. California Water Boards staff should take reasonable steps to obtain interpretation services at meetings where it is reasonably expected that participants will require such services. Staff should utilize the associated guidance and Four-Factor Analysis established by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to determine if simultaneous interpretation is necessary and would be helpful for limited and/or non-English speakers and should be offered without requiring advance requests from the public.
2. All State Water Board and Regional Water Boards board meetings or staff workshops that are providing interpretation services should provide instructions for accessing language services during the meeting.
3. California Water Boards staff should provide background meeting materials to the assigned interpreters and, if possible, may conduct an optional meeting rehearsal with the assigned interpreters ahead of the meeting.
4. Members of the public may prefer or request to use a family member or friend as an interpreter. However, California Water Boards staff may not require that a member of the public use a family member or friend as an interpreter, and must first offer to provide an interpreter free-of-charge. If the member of the public chooses to use a family member or friend as an interpreter, California Water Boards staff should take into consideration the adequacy of the interpretation and if there is any conflict of interest. The use of children and/or minors as personal interpreters should be avoided.



## VI | PUBLIC REQUESTS FOR LANGUAGE SERVICES

The California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to provide interpretation, translation, and assistive communication services in any language requested and at no cost to the requestor. Examples of public requests include:

- **Translation of vital documents**
- **Oral interpretation services**
- **Real-time interpretation over-the-phone**
- **Direct customer service and engagement with bilingual staff**
- **Assistive communication services:**
  - American Sign Language interpretation
  - Real-time captioning (CART services)
  - Alternative format vital documents (e.g., Braille, large print)
  - TTY/TDD phone services for individuals with hearing impairments.

### STEP 1: SUBMIT A REQUEST

Language services should be requested as far in advance as possible. For meetings and public events, submit requests at least ten days before the scheduled meeting date, if possible. Requests can be made verbally or in writing to the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs and should include:

- **Your name (or the requester's name)**
- **Contact information (phone, email)**
- **The meeting, service, or document for which you are requesting language services**
- **Any relevant details about the request**

Any member of the public or their representative may request language services to participate in a Water Boards meeting, event, or service by submitting a request via one of the following submission methods:

### Submission Methods

- **Online Form (preferred method):** [Language Access Request Form](#)
  - The Language Access Request Form is available in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Simplified Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Punjabi.
- **Email:** [LanguageServices@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:LanguageServices@waterboards.ca.gov)
- **Phone:** (916) 341-5254

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

- **Mail:**  
Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs  
Language Access Coordinator  
State Water Resources Control Board  
1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

### STEP 2: PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS

The Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs will engage with the individual requesting language services and the relevant program area to clarify and confirm the request.

### STEP 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Once language services are received and approved, notification will be shared with the person requesting services and with the relevant program staff. The language service will be promptly provided and provided free of charge.

### STEP 4: PROVIDE FEEDBACK

After language services have been provided, the Water Boards may follow up to assess the effectiveness of the accommodation. Members of the public are encouraged to provide feedback about their experience.

### STEP 5: CLOSING THE REQUEST

The Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs will retain documentation of all requested and provided language services. Feedback received will be used to improve the Water Boards' processes, staff training, and language services.

## VII | PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS

Members of the public have the right to file a complaint (also known as a grievance) if they believe they were denied meaningful language access. Complaints may be submitted by the affected individual or their representative.

### STEP 1: SUBMIT A COMPLAINT

Complaints should be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than 60 calendar days after the incident. This deadline may be extended in certain situations, such as if the complainant, through reasonable diligence, could not have discovered the facts earlier.

Complaints must be made in writing to the Language Access Coordinator in the Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs and should include:

- **Name (and if applicable, the name of a representative or the individual you are representing)**
- **Contact information (phone, email, mailing address)**
- **A description of the incident, including:**
  - Date, time, and location
  - Relevant California Water Boards staff or program involved
  - A detailed account of the alleged failure to provide meaningful language services, such as interpretation, translation, or assistive communication devices. Describe whether the complaint involves language-based discrimination or retaliation for requesting language assistance. Describe, to the extent possible, how the lack of language access impacted the individual's ability to understand, engage with, or participate in California Water Boards programs, services, or activities.

### Submission Methods

- **Online Form (preferred method):** [Online Complaint Form](#)
- **Email:** [complaints@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:complaints@waterboards.ca.gov)
- **Phone:** (916) 341-5254
- **Mail:**  
Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs  
Language Access Coordinator  
State Water Resources Control Board  
1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

The Online Complaint Form is available in English, Spanish, Tagalog, Simplified Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Punjabi. Complaints do not need to be written in English. The California Water Boards will take reasonable steps to ensure the complaint process is accessible to individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities. Alternative formats (e.g., interviews, audio recordings, large print) are available upon request.

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

### STEP 2: ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND INTAKE

Once a complaint is submitted, the Language Access Coordinator will acknowledge receipt and may schedule a meeting with the complainant to gather additional information. Complainants may also share proposed resolutions or recommendations.

### STEP 3: INTERNAL REVIEW AND RESOLUTION

The Language Access Coordinator will:

- **Notify relevant California Water Boards program staff and the Office of Chief Counsel.**
- **Convene an internal review meeting to evaluate the complaint, supporting documentation, and applicable policies.**
- **Determine appropriate corrective actions based on the facts of the case and the nature of the violation. Complaints will be evaluated using the preponderance of the evidence standard, meaning the determination will be based on whether it is more likely than not that a policy violation occurred.**

Examples of corrective actions include the following:

Complaint Scenario	Potential Resolution
If a reasonable public request for language services was denied.	The Language Access Coordinator will provide program staff and their supervisor with a written reminder of language access laws and requirements. The Language Access Coordinator will collaborate with program staff to develop and implement a language access plan for the remainder of the project or program's public engagement process.
If a reasonable public request for translated materials was denied.	The Language Access Coordinator will provide the complainant with requested materials translated into the target language.
If a reasonable public request for interpretation services was denied.	The Language Access Coordinator may offer the complainant a follow-up meeting with program staff and a professional interpreter to receive a summary of the missed meeting.

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

Complaint Scenario	Potential Resolution
If a complaint involves the inadequacy of language services provided.	<p>The Language Access Coordinator will meet with the complainant to gather details on the inadequacy of language services provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback regarding language terminology will be communicated to the third-party contractor and the service provider. This feedback may also inform updates to the California Water Boards glossary of water terms that is used by interpreters and translators.</li> <li>• The Language Access Coordinator will work with the third-party contractor to identify and rectify any technical issues, and develop protocols to prevent future occurrences.</li> <li>• If an interpreter or translator receives multiple complaints, the Language Access Coordinator will coordinate with the third-party contractor to remove the individual from future California Water Boards assignments.</li> </ul>

### STEP 4: IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The Language Access Coordinator will:

- **Implement corrective actions promptly.**
- **Document all steps taken in the internal tracking system.**
- **Provide the complainant a written notice of the outcome of the investigation, including whether a violation was found and a summary of the actions taken or planned in response.**
- **Offer an opportunity for the complainant to provide feedback or request additional assistance.**

### STEP 5: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The California Water Boards will regularly review complaint trends, feedback received, and emerging needs to ensure continuous improvement. All complaint records are maintained securely and used to inform staff training and system improvements.

## VIII | EXTERNAL COMPLAINT OPTIONS

If a complaint does not meet the criteria under this Policy but raises concerns that warrant further review, the Language Access Coordinator may, at their discretion, refer the complaint to the appropriate party for follow-up. The complainant will be informed, either verbally or in writing, before any such referral is made.

This complaint procedure is not a prerequisite for seeking judicial or other forms of external relief, nor does it limit or preclude a complainant from pursuing such remedies. Members of the public who believe the California Water Boards have not adequately addressed a language access complaint may also file complaints with the following external agencies:

### **California Department of Human Resources (CalHR)**

The California Department of Human Resources offers an informal process for addressing language access complaints. The public can call the toll-free number **1 (866) 889-3278** to leave a message in their language.

### **California Civil Rights Department (CRD)**

The California Civil Rights Department complaint process is designed to address instances of discrimination within State of California-funded programs. To begin the process, an intake form can be filed and submitted in one of three ways:

- **Online by creating an account and using CRD's interactive [California Civil Rights System](#)**
- **Email: [contact.center@calcivilrights.ca.gov](mailto:contact.center@calcivilrights.ca.gov)**
- **Phone: (800) 884-1684 (voice), (800) 700-2320 (TTY) or California's Relay Service at 711**
- **Mail:**  
California Civil Rights Department  
651 Bannon Street, Suite 200  
Sacramento, CA 95811

More information on how to file a complaint with the California Civil Rights Department can be found on the [Complaint Process webpage](#).

## LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY

### US Environmental Protection Agency

The US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) complaint process is designed to address instances of discrimination against recipients of federal funding. A complaint may be submitted in one of three ways:

- **Email:** [Title VI Complaints@epa.gov](mailto:Title_VI_Complaints@epa.gov)
- **Phone:** (202) 564-3316
- **Mail:**  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of External Civil Rights  
Mail code 2310A  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20460

More information on how to file a complaint with the US EPA can be found on the US EPA [Filing a Discrimination Complaint Against a Recipient of EPA Funds](#) webpage.

## **IX | CONFIDENTIALITY**

The California Water Boards strive to protect the confidentiality of the complainant and all participants in the complaint process to the greatest extent possible and as authorized by law. However, the nature of this process does not permit absolute confidentiality. The Non-Discrimination Coordinator (or ADA Coordinator, as applicable) may release information as necessary to evaluate and resolve the complaint.

If, in the course of reviewing or responding to a complaint, the California Water Boards become aware of information that warrants further personnel action, a separate personnel investigation may be initiated. In such cases, information provided through the complaint process may be shared with appropriate California Water Boards personnel and outside parties, including the State Personnel Board, as part of that process.

## **X | RETALIATION PROHIBITED**

The California Water Boards strictly prohibit retaliation against anyone who files a complaint or participates in the complaint process. This includes individuals who report concerns, pursue a complaint, or assist in an investigation.

Retaliation is illegal under state and federal law, including 40 C.F.R. Parts 5 and 7. The California Water Boards will not tolerate any form of discipline, intimidation, or retaliation for exercising rights protected under this Policy or applicable law.

Anyone who believes they have experienced retaliation may file a complaint with the California Water Boards using the procedures outlined in this Policy.

## **XI | REQUESTING ALTERNATIVE FORMATS**

This Language Access Policy is translated into Spanish. If you need this document in an alternative format (i.e., Braille, large print), or another language, please email [LanguageServices@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:LanguageServices@waterboards.ca.gov) or call **(916) 341-5254**.



## XII | DISCLAIMER

This Policy is intended to provide guidance on the internal processes of the California Water Boards and the implementation of language access requirements. It does not create any enforceable rights, obligations, or legal standards beyond those already established under applicable federal and state law. Where the guidance and directions may be construed as implementing or making specific statutory or regulatory requirements, such guidance and direction is only intended to suggest best practices. This Policy does not apply to other governmental agencies or external entities unless specifically stated.

This Policy is intended to complement—not supersede—any existing laws, regulations, or policies. Nothing in this Policy shall be interpreted to prevent the California Water Boards or the California Environmental Protection Agency from taking timely action to fulfill legal obligations to protect public health, ensure accessibility, or safeguard the environment.

## XIII | POINT OF CONTACT

For questions or concerns about this Language Access Policy, please contact the State Water Board's Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs.

**Language Access Coordinator:** Office of Public Engagement, Equity, and Tribal Affairs Director

**Phone:** (916) 341-5254

**Email:** [LanguageServices@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:LanguageServices@waterboards.ca.gov)

**Address:** 1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

**Website:** [Home Page](#) | [California State Water Resources Control Board](#)

[Public Request for Language Services](#) | [California State Water Resources Control Board](#)