



## Illinois Department of Early Childhood Language Access Plan

### Section 1: Introduction and Background

#### 1.1 Agency Overview

The State of Illinois is home to one of the largest immigrant populations in the United States, with nearly 1.9 million immigrants contributing to the state's vibrant cultural and economic landscape. Among them, nearly 1 million residents speak languages other than English at home and report speaking English less than "very well." As this linguistically diverse population continues to grow, Illinois recognizes that all residents—regardless of English proficiency—have a right to equitable access to government services.

This Language Access Plan outlines the Illinois Department of Early Childhood's ("IDEC's") five-year plan for language access implementation, a timeline selected to achieve greater alignment with the Illinois Language Equity and Access Act. Section 1 of the Language Access Plan sets the stage for the plan by providing an overview of IDEC and establishing the purpose, goals, and guiding principles that anchor the Language Access Plan. The sections that follow, Sections 2 to 7, address specific areas of language access implementation. Each area of implementation is addressed in two distinct parts, which include:

1. **Overview of Standard** (or Implementation Area): A brief description of the standard based on federal guidance and the Language Equity and Access Act; and
2. **Current IDEC Systems and Practices:** A description of IDEC's current practices, existing infrastructure, and/or progress to date in relation to the standard.

IDEC's plan will include Implementation Goals and a 5-Year Action Plan which will support agency implementation.

**IDEC Overview:** The Illinois Department of Early Childhood (IDEC) was established pursuant to PA 103-0594 to focus on early childhood programs and services for young children, ages birth to age 5, with the goal of creating a simpler, fairer, better system. Currently, the majority of early childhood programs are spread among three agencies: Illinois State Board of Education; Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; and Illinois Department of Human Services. Beginning July 1, 2026, the Department of Early Childhood will be the lead agency for the Early Childhood Block Grant which funds the Preschool for All and Prevention Initiative Programs; The Child Care Assistance Program, Home Visiting Programs, Early Intervention Programs, Migrant

and Seasonal Head Start and Head Start Collaborative Office, and Day Care Licensing. These programs serve a diverse range of individuals throughout the state. As such the Department is a public facing agency and will need to provide Language Access services to those with Limited English Proficiency when it takes over the legacy programs on July 1, 2026. Currently, the Department is not providing services as it stands up operations. More information about IDEC can be found on the IDEC website: [dec.illinois.gov](http://dec.illinois.gov).

### **Purpose and Goals**

**Goal:** The goal of the IDEC Language Access Plan (LAP) is to enhance access to the Department's services for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and to establish an efficient system that allows LEP individuals to fully benefit from these services in alignment with the agency's core mission, without imposing undue burdens or barriers. IDEC is committed to providing prompt, effective, and high-quality language assistance services to ensure access for LEP individuals. The Language Access Plan also seeks to align IDEC's efforts and bring IDEC into compliance with the Illinois Language Equity and Access Act (Public Act 103-0723), the Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other applicable federal and state standards and guidelines.

**Purpose:** This plan outlines IDEC's strategy to ensure meaningful access for individuals with LEP to IDEC's services, in accordance with the Language Equity and Access Act [15 ILCS 56].

### **Authority**

As a recipient of federal financial assistance, Illinois is bound by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d-2000d-7, and its implementing regulations, 45 C.F.R. Part 80, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin (which includes Limited English Proficiency). Illinois is committed to advancing the goals of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in alignment with the State of Illinois' Language Equity and Access Act (Public Act 103-0723)

### ***Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964***

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d) (Title VI) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. As a recipient of federal financial assistance, the Illinois Department Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d-2000d-7, and its implementing regulation, 45 C.F.R. Part 80, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin (which includes Limited English Proficiency).

### ***Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003***

The Illinois Civil Rights Act prohibits State, county, or local government in Illinois from excluding a person from participation in, denying a person the benefits of, or subjecting a person to discrimination under any program or activity on the grounds of that person's race, color, national origin, or gender. Additionally, the Illinois Civil Rights Act prohibits using criteria or methods that have a discriminatory effect.

## ***Illinois Human Rights Act (IHRA)***

The Illinois Human Rights Act consolidates existing laws and administrative processes addressing civil rights in Illinois. IHRA prohibits discrimination in employment, housing, financial credit, and public accommodations because of race, color, sex, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, unfavorable military discharge, and marital status, as well as retaliation for opposing discrimination. IHRA established the Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) and the Illinois Human Rights Commission (IHRC) as enforcing agencies.

***The Language Equity and Access Act (“the Act”)*** was signed into law by Governor Pritzker in 2024, and aims to ensure that all residents can access state information, programs, and services equitably, and that limited English proficiency does not prevent anyone from fully participating in civic life. The Act aims to ensure all Illinois residents, including individuals with LEP, have meaningful and equitable access to state services, programs, information, and activities by removing language barriers. The act incorporates federal guidance for ensuring meaningful access for individuals with LEP and other federal and state legislation that prohibit discrimination based on national origin and promote language access, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Illinois Human Rights Act of 1979, and the Illinois Civil Rights Act of 2003.<sup>3</sup>

The Act designates the Governor’s Office of New Americans (ONA) as the lead agency responsible for coordinating the implementation of statewide language access policy, with the support of the Department of Human Services. ONA is tasked with providing oversight, offering technical assistance, and ensuring agency compliance with the Act’s requirements.

Under the Act, the ONA will lead the development of a Language Needs Assessment Report using U.S. Census data to identify the languages spoken across Illinois and inform agency planning. All state agencies will develop Language Access Plans that will inform how the agency will ensure meaningful access to individuals with LEP, appoint a Language Access Coordinator (LAC) to oversee implementation within each agency, and translate vital documents and provide qualified interpretation services for LEP populations.

## **Guiding Principles**

In accordance with federal and state requirements, including the Illinois Language Equity and Access Act (Public Act 103-0723), this Language Access Plan provides a framework for ensuring IDEC can deliver timely and meaningful language assistance services to IDEC’s constituents with LEP. IDEC is committed to providing equitable language access to its services, programs, and activities for all individuals, regardless of the language they use. IDEC will operationalize this commitment to language access by:

- Designating a Language Access Coordinator who is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the Language Access Plan.
- Serving all individuals with LEP and providing accurate, timely, and effective communication, including oral and written language services needed to assist persons with LEP to communicate effectively, and providing them with equal opportunity to participate fully in the services, activities, or other programs administered by the state. This includes

displaying public notices in commonly spoken languages that communicate the availability of free language assistance services and how to access them.

- Conducting a regular assessment that describes the population of persons with LEP the agency serves, the policy and programmatic actions implemented to ensure meaningful access, and the metrics used to measure compliance with the Language Equity and Access Act. This assessment will be informed by the federally recognized four-factor analysis, which considers the number or proportion of persons with LEP served, the frequency and context, the nature and importance of services provided, and the agency's available resources and costs.
- Strengthening IDEC's capacity to develop and distribute multilingual content and expanding access to translated vital documents and other resources. Translation of vital records will be prioritized with guidance provided by the Governor's Office of New Americans. The agency will also work to expand multilingual website content, including program information, complaint procedures, and eligibility criteria.
- Establishing mechanisms to track progress across divisions, programs, and funded partners, and supporting efforts to meet language access compliance standards. This includes collecting and reporting data on how to use interpretation and translation vendor services, including volume, language type, and service type. IDEC will maintain a complaint and review process and ensure timely resolution.
- Provide ongoing employee development and training to maintain well-trained bilingual employees and general staff. IDEC will also collect and report data on bilingual staff roles, language certifications, and language capacity across its workforce.
- Ensuring the Language Access Plan and related materials are publicly available through IDEC's website and other accessible formats.

## Definitions

- **“Department”** or **“IDEC”** for purposes of this Plan means the Illinois Department of Early Childhood.
- **“Interpretation”** means the act of *listening, understanding, analyzing, and processing a spoken communication in one language (source language) and then orally converting to another spoken language (target language) while retaining the same meaning* [15 ILCS 56/10].
- **“Interpreter”** means a person who facilitates communication by converting speech from one language to another, communicating the style and tone of the speaker, while considering differences of culture, dialect, and setting. The listeners should hear the interpreted message as if it had been originally spoken in their language.
- **“Language Access Plan” or “LAP”** refers to the document developed by the Department that outlines mechanisms to provide accurate and meaningful access to all Services, activities, benefits, and programs conducted both by the Department and the contributing agency to people who are non-English speaking or have limited English proficiency writing, reading, or speaking English.
- **“Language Assistance”** refers to all oral and written means used to provide individuals with a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English with meaningful access

to, and an equal opportunity to participate fully in the services, activities, and other programs administered by the Department.

- **“Language Assistance Services”** means *oral and written services needed to assist LEP individuals to communicate effectively with staff, and to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to, and equal opportunity to participate fully in, the services, activities, or other programs administered by the Department.* [15 ILCS 56/10]
- **“Limited English Proficient (LEP) Person”** means *an individual who does not speak English as their primary language and who has a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English* [15 ILCS 56/10]. The acronym “**LEP**” also applies to “**Limited English Proficiency**,” referring to the condition of having a limited ability to communicate effectively in English.
- **“Meaningful Access”** for individuals with *LEP* means *access that is not unreasonably restricted, delayed, or inferior as compared to access to programs or activities provided to English-proficient individuals* [15 ILCS 56/10].
- **“Primary Language” or “Preferred Language”** means the language that an individual uses most frequently and comfortably to communicate with others in most situations. This language may or may not be the first language learned or spoken in their home.
- **“Program”** or **“Activity”** refers to all the operations of the Department.
- **“Translation”** means the process of converting written text from one language to another into written form as completely and accurately as possible, while maintaining the style, tone, and considering differences in culture and dialect to convey the intent and essential meaning of the original text [15 ILCS 56/10].
- **“Vital Documents”** means paper or electronic written material that contains information that affects a person’s access to, retention of, termination of, or exclusion from program services or benefits or is required by law.

## **Section 2: Needs Assessment**

Illinois is home to a diverse population with cultural and linguistic backgrounds from around the world. To support IDEC in determining and prioritizing language assistance services, the Language Access Plan includes a Needs Assessment that identifies the languages spoken by individuals with languages other than English served or likely to be served by IDEC.

A four-factor analysis is used in this section as a framework to determine the language services IDEC needs to prioritize to meet the needs of individuals with limited English proficiency. The four-factor analysis is a tool designed to help recipients of federal financial assistance conduct an individualized assessment that considers the following four factors:

1. Factor 1: Data collection and analysis of the population with limited English proficiency
2. Factor 2: Data collection and analysis of languages encountered
3. Factor 3: Services Provided to General Public and/or Prospective Limited English Proficient Users
4. Factor 4: Budget and Available Resources

Data provided in this section illustrates the number of individuals with limited English proficiency who may need language services, as well as the types of services IDEC provides that the general public and potential individuals with LEP would access.

## **2.1 FOUR FACTOR ANALYSIS**

### FACTOR 1: Data collection and analysis of the population with limited English proficiency

#### **Overview of Standard**

Limited English Proficient Population Data Collection and Analysis assesses the number or proportion of individuals with limited English proficiency that could be served by or could encounter IDEC's services. The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires each State agency to conduct an individualized assessment to determine the adequacy of its Language Access Plan. This assessment must consider the frequency with which persons with LEP come in contact with services, programs, or activities provided by the agency. This report must identify languages spoken throughout the State and examine the geographic patterns and trend data to inform the development of agency Language Access Plans.

The Language Access Plan must include a description of the LEP populations served, the policy and programmatic actions taken to ensure meaningful access, and the metrics used to measure compliance with the Act. Agencies must regularly monitor demographic population changes to ensure language services adequately reflect actual needs, particularly for services frequently utilized by the public.

This analysis helps ensure that IDEC is positioned to adequately identify underserved communities with LEP and emerging language needs and address any barriers that may prevent access to critical public services.

#### **Current IDEC Systems and Practices:**

In 2025, IDEC is using the following findings from a demographic analysis conducted by the University of Illinois Chicago in partnership with the Office of New Americans on the State's individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with LEP:

- In Illinois, 1.0 million residents speak English less than "very well," and speak a language other than English at home. Both federal and state policies recognize that these individuals have a right to equitable access to government services, which includes information and communication in a language they understand.
- Eleven languages have more than 10,000 limited-English speakers in Illinois.

The predominant language other than English in many Illinois counties may be Spanish, but closer examination of the most common non-English languages shows that immigrants and migrants come to Illinois from many places. For example, in Champaign County, the top language spoken in limited English households is Mandarin, and in Macon County, it is Tagalog. Additionally, in Cass and Knox counties, the second language is French/Haitian/Cajun. In Madison County, it's

Tagalog. In Cook, DuPage, and Kane counties, the second language category is Slavic. In Boone County, “other Asian Pacific Islander” is second to Spanish.

A statewide map of persons who don’t speak English very well shows that the largest numbers of such persons are in the metro Chicago area. Nevertheless, significant numbers of up to 9 thousand are located in townships across the state and are often located near metro areas such as St. Louis, Springfield, Champaign, and Rock Island. There are also notable populations in relatively rural townships in counties such as Cass, Douglas, or Union.

After years of decline, the number of Illinois residents who don’t speak English very well is on the rise. In examining ten years, from 2014 to 2023, this population fell by 79,000 persons between 2014 and 2019. But since a low of 1.0 million in 2019, the most recent data, for the year 2023, shows about 1,082,000 persons, for a gain of some 82,000.

## FACTOR 2: Data collection and analysis of languages encountered

### **Overview of Standard**

Language Encounters Data Collection and Analysis assesses the frequency with which limited English proficient (LEP) individuals encounter IDEC's services, programs, or activities. The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State agencies to conduct an individualized assessment as part of its Language Access Plan that considers the frequency with which persons with LEP come into contact with the services, programs, and activities provided by the agency. This analysis supports the IDEC's ability to identify language access needs and ensure meaningful access.

In order to ensure that all IDEC encounters with individuals with LEP across programs and services are collected in a comprehensive and ongoing manner, IDEC will:

- Collect data on encounters with individuals with LEP that take place in person, by telephone, via email, and through online platforms.
- Track the languages encounters and types of language assistance services requested and/or provided during those encounters; and
- Conduct regular assessments and identify high-volume languages and the most frequently requested or needed language assistance services to ensure meaningful access that is accurate, timely, and effective at no cost to persons with LEP.

### **Current IDEC Systems and Practices: How IDEC collects and monitors data over time related to Language Access:**

Number and Percentage of LEP Individuals Who Use IDEC Services: Currently, IDEC is not providing any direct services. As part of standing up the new agency, IDEC is engaging vendors to review data from the transferring agencies to determine what populations are currently being served by legacy programs, and where and how to focus and improve services. Part of that analysis will be to determine how many LEP individuals will use IDEC's services.

IDEc has data sharing agreements in place with all three transferring agencies and is reviewing the data being shared. IDEc is also working with a vendor to get a better picture of the early childhood landscape in Illinois. IDEc will continue to review data from our transferring agencies and working with our vendor to understand the early childhood landscape, including LEP children and parents in Illinois.

**List of Bilingual Employees:** IDEc currently has a team of 30. Six of IDEc's executive employees are bilingual or proficient in a second language. As we build the team, we will work to add bilingual team members throughout the state. On July 1, 2026, transferring agency staff will become IDEc staff. Some of the transferring agency staff will be Bilingual staff serving LEP individuals and communities.

**Data on translation and interpretation services:** Currently, IDEc does not operate any services and relies on the transferring agencies (DCFS, DHS, and ISBE) to provide this information in their Language Access Plans. As IDEc prepares for the transitions of programs and services, it is providing opportunities for stakeholders to engage and provide feedback. This includes providing language interpretation at public meetings and resource materials in Spanish.

**Data on number of complaints filed and status:** Currently there are no complaints against IDEc for failure to provide translation or interpretation services.

### FACTOR 3: Services Provided to General Public and/or Prospective Limited English Proficient Users

#### **Overview of Standard**

Services Provided to General Public and/or Prospective Limited English Proficient Users, assesses the nature and importance of the programs, activities, or services provided by IDEc.

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State Agencies to implement an individualized assessment as part of their Language Access Plan that includes the nature and importance of the services, programs, or activities provided by the State agency.

To ensure meaningful access to critical and urgent information and services, IDEc will outline procedures for prioritizing language assistance for vital and urgent information and activities. IDEc will review all services and information and will prioritize language assistance for programs, activities, services, or information that, if not understood by individuals using languages other than English, could have immediate and/or severe impacts.

#### **Current IDEc Systems and Practices**

IDEc is in the process of evaluating programs transferring to IDEc from the three transferring agencies. IDEc currently does not administer programs; however, the programs IDEc will inherit serve children and their families throughout the state. Beginning July 1, 2026, IDEc will be responsible for the programs which may serve LEP individuals, including but not limited to:

- Child Care Licensing;
- Child Care Assistance Program;

- Pre-school programs;
- Home Visiting Programs;
- Early Intervention Program; and
- Prevention Initiative.

Currently, IDEC is working with vendors and transferring agencies to identify vital documents that will need translated. IDEC's intent is to provide all public facing documents and forms in the top languages spoken in the state. While IDEC is working to stand up operations, the transferring agencies are responsible for establishing and maintaining the list of vital documents.

Prior to administering programs, IDEC will identify all public facing documents to ensure that they are available in the top languages in Illinois. IDEC will work to develop a plan to continuously identify vital documents and ensure they are available in the top languages in Illinois.

IDEK plans to use the CMS master contract for translation of documents. Currently, we are using Interprenet (from the CMS master contract) to provide translation and interpretation services as part of our public engagement efforts. IDEC's current communication support contract contains requirements that communication and engagement occur in languages other than English. IDEC, through the CMS master vendor will ensure that documents are reviewed for accuracy and correctness.

Once IDEC is responsible for program administration, IDEC will ensure that bilingual staff are certified bilingual via the appropriate CMS process, and will have translated documents reviewed by two certified bilingual staff members when possible. Once IDEC stands up operations, IDEC will maintain a list of written translation services.

IDEK will develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for how staff determine when and how to provide translation services. Currently, IDEC relies on the transferring agencies to determine and provide translations. As IDEC works to understand the current landscape, we will work with vendors, transferring agency staff and stakeholders to develop an interpretation plan that meets the requirements of the Illinois Language Equity and Access Act and addresses parent and provider needs in the State of Illinois.

#### FACTOR 4: Budget and Available Resources

##### **Overview of Standard**

Budget and Available Resources assesses the resources available to IDEC'S currently, as well as the cost associated with providing the language assistance. The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State Agencies to review the resources available to the State Agency and the costs. It is best practice for the budget for language access services to be based on programmatic needs and the top five languages prioritized for services. Additionally, a strategic practice is to outline the costs associated with current language assistance services, as well as assess the level of resources, costs, and capacity to implement and support additional language services over time. Based on the assessment of resources, IDEC'S will identify efforts to support cost-savings and

cost-sharing when/if needed. Such efforts may include sharing resources with other departments and agencies and/or using technology to support the delivery of language assistance services.

**Current Budget and Available Resources:**

IDEA is currently developing a plan to track and assess the costs of providing language access services. IDEA is working on setting up mechanisms for tracking vendor contracts and services provided. While IDEA works to establish internal systems, programs administered by transferring agencies will continue to use the transferring Agency's tracking system.

## **Section 3: Staffing and Coordination:**

### **Overview of Standard**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act outlines the requirements for each State agency to designate a Language Access Coordinator who is responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the agency's language access plan. The Language Access Coordinator will support ongoing compliance by partnering with ONA to ensure coordinated implementation and compliance with language access requirements.

To ensure adequate staffing to support the development, management, and oversight of the language access activities, and consistent with the Language Equity and Access Act's directive to ensure adequate staff of bilingual employees, IDEA will establish internal roles to implement its Language Access Plan. These roles include a Language Access Coordinator and may also include a Language Access Liaison within divisions or programs to support localized implementation and coordination of language assistance services, in alignment with national language access best practices.

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act directs State agencies to incorporate language equity compliance provisions into their contracts with vendors, grantees, and purchase of care entities, ensuring that these funded entities provide language assistance services to individuals with LEP.

IDEA will conduct programs and services in partnership with a wide network of grantees and funded entities. Therefore, IDEA will take affirmative steps to ensure those entities fulfill language access obligations to support monitoring and accountability.

**Current State: Language Access Coordinator:** IDEA will designate a Language Access Coordinator before July 1, 2026, and ensure that the Language Access Coordinator is in place prior to IDEA administering programs.

- The Language Access Coordinator will be responsible for conducting annual assessments of language assistance needs. This includes consulting with IDEA divisions, advocacy organizations, LEP individuals, subject matter experts, and relevant research partners to

- identify effective practices for assessing and addressing language access requirements across all public-facing services.
- Additionally, the Language Access Coordinator will develop and administer a user satisfaction survey to gather feedback on the effectiveness of Language assistance. The Language Access Coordinator will also assess progress and effectiveness in fulfilling IDEC's obligations to provide services to LEP individuals. This will include sharing resources and identifying effective practices for addressing key language access issues such as training, translation, interpretation, and other critical areas across divisions and programs.

## **Section 4: Language Assisted Services**

IDECA is committed to taking reasonable steps to ensure meaningful communication and access to information for IDECA's users with LEP. The Language Assistance Services section outlines the types of language assistance IDECA currently provides, as well as the services IDECA plans to provide to support meaningful communication and participation for individuals with LEP and who are limited English proficient. The language assistance services outlined in the Language Access

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of IDECA's language access staff, including Language Access Coordinators and Language Access Liaisons, who are responsible for monitoring and ensuring the implementation of language assistance services according to the Language Access Plan across the agency.

### **4.1 Language Assistance Services Plan**

#### **I. LANGUAGE NEED IDENTIFICATION**

##### **Overview of Standard**

The Language Access Plan requires State Agencies to develop clear policy and programmatic actions to ensure meaningful access. It is national language access best practice for State Agencies to utilize language-need identification materials, such as printed multilingual I-Speak resource cards, to assist with the identification of the languages requested by individuals with LEP. These tools support meaningful access by enabling individuals with LEP to indicate their language needs, consistent with State Agencies' obligations to ensure accurate, timely, and effective communication.

##### **Current IDECA Systems and Practices:**

IDECA currently does not administer programs. IDECA is working to develop policies to ensure meaningful access to LEP individuals. IDECA plans to use I-Speak resource cards and other methods to provide meaningful access to LEP individuals.

#### **II. HIRING/CONTRACTING QUALIFIED INTERPRETERS FOR IN-PERSON COMMUNICATION**

### **Overview of Standard:**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State Agencies to ensure individuals with LEP have access to competent, timely, and effective interpretation services when interacting with agency staff, programs, and services. Agencies are required to provide meaningful access. Using trained and qualified interpreters, in alignment with standards developed by ONA, supports State agency compliance and ensures meaningful access.

### **Current IDEC Systems and Practices:**

Currently, IDEC is using Interprenet (from the CMS master contract) to provide translation and interpretation services as part of our public engagement efforts. IDEC's current communication support contract contains requirements that communication and engagement occur in languages other than English. IDEC, through the CMS master vendor will ensure that documents are reviewed for accuracy and correctness.

Once IDEC is responsible for program administration, IDEC will ensure that bilingual staff are certified bilingual via the appropriate CMS process, and will have translated documents reviewed by two certified bilingual staff members when possible. Once IDEC stands up operations, IDEC will maintain a list of written translation services.

IDEK will develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for how staff determine when and how to provide translation services. Currently, IDEC relies on the transferring agencies to determine and provide translations. As IDEC works to understand the current landscape, we will work with vendors, transferring agency staff and stakeholders to develop an interpretation plan that meets the requirements of 15 ILCS 56 and addresses parent and provider needs in the State of Illinois.

## **III. HIRING/CONTRACTING QUALIFIED INTERPRETERS FOR VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION (OVER-THE-PHONE OR VIDEO)**

### **Overview of Standard**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State Agencies to ensure individuals with LEP have access to competent, timely, and effective interpretation services when interacting with agency staff, programs, and services.

### **Current IDEC'S Systems and Practices**

IDEK is not currently administering programs and relies on the three transferring agencies for day to day interactions with the individuals receiving services. From the beginning, IDEC has acknowledged the importance of community outreach and hearing from a diverse group of individuals if IDEC wants to achieve its mission. To this end, IDEC has engaged in multiple outreach opportunities including, but not limited to:

- Bimonthly Listen Sessions (with Spanish Language interpretation). This includes a feedback survey tool available in English and Spanish;
- Monthly Transition Advisory Council Meeting (with Spanish Language interpretation). This includes a feedback survey tool available in English and Spanish;
- Workgroup meetings;
- Regional listening sessions (in partnership with local stakeholders) (with Spanish Language interpretation). This included at least one meeting in every county in the state; and
- Meetings with local providers, families, and stakeholders across the state (in person and virtually).
- Legislative engagement including legislators elevating constituent concerns about translation issues, which allows IDEC to understand further where barriers can lie within the early childhood education system.

IDEC will continue to engage with stakeholders as the agency works to administer programs, and gather feedback on how to better serve the community, including LEP individuals.

## **IV. EMPLOYING/ UTILIZING BILINGUAL OR MULTILINGUAL STAFF**

### **Overview of Standard**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act require the Governor's Office of New Americans, with the support of the Department of Human Services, and any other relevant agencies to set standards for adequate staffing of bilingual employees at State Agencies, including a methodology for monitoring implementation and updating the State Services Assurance Act and the Bilingual Employment Plan, based on the Language needs Assessment. While the Language Equity and Access Act specifically uses the term "bilingual staff", national language access best practices recognize and value the role of multilingual staff, highlighting the broad linguistic competencies of individuals who possess proficiency in more than two languages or multiple linguistic repertoires.

### **Current IDEC'S Systems and Practices**

IDEC does not administer programs at this time. IDEC relies on vendors to provide translation services during listening sessions and town halls. IDEC will be inheriting bilingual staff from the transferring agencies on July 1, 2026.

### **Internal Procedures/Protocol:**

Prior to program administration, IDEC will develop a process for staff interactions with LEP individual seeking services for:

- Telephone communications;

- In Person communications;
- Recording and tracking language preference information;
- Providing written correspondence; and
- Guidance on website translation capabilities with easily visible translation tools.

IDEC will develop a training to ensure staff are trained on IDEC's Language Access Plan and on interacting with LEP individuals.

- Staff from transferring agencies will receive training on IDEC's Language Access Plan and on expectations for interacting with LEP individuals as part of the transition to IDEC.
- New staff will receive training on IDEC's Language Access Plan when they are onboarded to IDEC.
- All IDEC staff will receive annual training on IDEC's Language Access Plan and resources for interacting with LEP individuals.
- Front Line staff will be required to take the annual training on IDEC's Language Access Plan and how to interact with LEP individuals as well as specific training for their position requirements.

## **V. TRANSLATION OF VITAL DOCUMENTS AND ONLINE CONTENT**

### **Overview of Standard**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires agencies to ensure that vital documents are translated accurately, completely, and in a timely manner by qualified translators.

- Translation of vital documents will be in accordance with the Language Equity & Access Act and guidance issued by ONA.

In instances where LEP populations fall below these thresholds but still require meaningful access, agencies must provide written notice in the primary language of the right to oral interpretation of the written material at no cost.

Translation priorities should be guided by the most recent Language Needs Assessment Report and the demographic data of the agency's service population.

### **Current IDEC'S Systems and Practices**

IDEC defines Vital documents as follows: “**Vital Documents**” means paper or electronic written material that contains information that affects a person's access to, retention of, termination of, or exclusion from program services or benefits or is required by law.

Currently, IDEC is working with vendors and transferring agencies to identify vital documents that will need translated. IDEC's intent is to provide all public facing documents and forms in the top languages spoken in the state. While IDEC is working to set up operations and towards administering programs, the transferring agencies are responsible for establishing and maintaining the list of vital documents.

IDEDEC will identify all public facing documents to ensure that they are available in the top languages in Illinois. IDEC will work to develop a plan to continuously identify vital documents and ensure they are available in the top languages in Illinois.

IDEDEC will work to incorporate language equity and compliance provisions into State contracts with vendors, grantees, and purchase-of-care entities. While IDEC currently utilizes CMS and DoIT master contracts, it will ensure that all future agency-specific contracts include this language.

## **VI. DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF MULTILINGUAL CONTENT IN OTHER FORMATS (PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS, RADIO MESSAGING, SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION)**

### **Overview of Standard**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State Agencies to take steps to ensure that digital content is accessible to individuals with LEP. All translations of public-facing digital content will be completed in a manner that ensures accuracy, completeness, and timeliness, consistent with the Act's requirement for competent translation services. The selection of languages for translation will be guided by current demographic data, the State's Language Needs Assessment, and thresholds outlined in the Language Equity and Access Act.

### **Current IDEC Systems and Practices**

IDEDEC works with DoIT and our transferring agencies to ensure content on IDEC's website is translated into the top six spoken languages other than English. IDEC will continue to work with DoIT and vendors to ensure the website is accessible and complies with the Language Equity and Access Act.

## **SECTION 5: NOTIFICATION OF LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES**

In addition to providing language assistance services, the Notification of Language Assistance Services section will outline how IDEC'S can notify the public of language assistance services and provide information on how language assistance services can be requested. Such communication will assist individuals with LEP in understanding the services provided by IDEC'S, which can increase public trust and confidence.

### **5.1 NOTIFICATION OF LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SERVICES PLAN**

## **Overview of Standard**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State Agencies ensure that the general public and individuals with LEP are informed of the availability of free interpretation and translation services and how to request them. To meet this requirement, IDEC will provide multilingual public notices in various formats—both digital and physical—to promote broad public awareness. All notices will clearly explain how individuals can request interpretation or translation services and will be made available in the most frequently spoken languages identified through demographic analysis and the State's Language Needs Assessment Report.

### **Current IDEC Systems and Practices:**

IDECA does not currently administer programs. IDECA is developing a plan to ensure LEP individuals are informed of the availability of free interpretation and translation services and how to request them. IDECA will have a plan in place by the time it takes over administration of programs on July 1, 2026.

## **SECTION 6: LANGUAGE ACCESS TRAINING**

IDECA'S is committed to providing ongoing employment development and training on language access to maintain well-trained bilingual employees, general staff, and all staff who interact with or may interact with individuals with LEP receive ongoing professional development and training on language access policies, procedures, and responsibilities. This section outlines the type of language access training to provide all IDECA's personnel, as well as specific training responsibilities for bilingual or multilingual employees, frontline staff, and other personnel who may interact with individuals with LEP. This section also identifies the timing, frequency, and delivery methods for how training shall be implemented across the agency and its divisions.

### **6.1 LANGUAGE ACCESS TRAINING PLAN**

#### **Overview of Standards**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires that State Agencies develop and implement an ongoing employee development and training strategy to maintain well-trained bilingual employees and general staff. This ensures the IDECA'S is equipped to deliver effective language assistance services.

#### **Current IDECA'S Systems and Practices:**

IDECA is developing plans to train current staff on IDECA's Language Access Plan and the requirements of the Language Access and Equity Act. Prior to July 1, 2026, IDECA will train transferring agency staff on IDECA's Language Access Plan and will require frontline staff to receive an annual training. IDECA will include Language Access training in its onboarding training materials.

## **SECTION 7: CONCERN RESOLUTION PROCESS**

The Concern Resolution Process Section of the Language Access Plan highlights the need for allowing public feedback on the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of language assistance services to address any concerns that arise. This section outlines how IDEC'S will develop and make publicly available a multilingual concern resolution form, collect and log complaints submitted by individuals with LEP and others, and promptly investigate and address each concern in a timely manner. Additionally, this section describes how the IDEC'S will track the resolution status of complaints to ensure transparency and accountability and coordinate with the ONA when appropriate to support compliance and continuous improvement.

### **Overview of Standard**

The Illinois Language Equity and Access Act requires State Agencies to establish and make publicly available a process for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) and members of the public to submit concerns related to access to language assistance services. Section 15(b)(5) of the Act requires each State agency to develop an internal complaint and review process specific to the provision of language assistance services. Complaints that are not resolved in a timely or satisfactory manner may be referred to the Governor's Office of New Americans for further review, per Section 30(c) of the Act.

### **Current IDEC'S Systems and Practices**

**Complaint Procedure:** Pursuant to the Language Equity and Access Act (15 ILCS 56), IDEC will develop an internal complaint and review process to allow any individual Illinois resident who believe they have received inadequate language assistance services from IDEC to file a language access complaint with IDEC. Prior to taking over program operations, the transferring programs will use the complaint process developed by the transferring agencies for the specific programs at those agencies. IDEC will use DHS complaint process until it is able to stand up its own operations and develop complaint procedures.

## **SECTION 8: MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING**

The Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting section of the Language Access Plan outlines the implementation and procedures IDEC will implement to assess compliance with the Illinois Equity and Access Act and evaluate the effectiveness of this Language Access Plan and its action items. This section will outline current practices and procedures for monitoring and collecting language access data, analyzing language use and language assistance needs, procedures for collecting and participating in community engagement/community feedback sessions to gather input on improvements to the Language Access Plan and language assistance service, and evaluating the quality of language assistance services offered by IDEC.

### **8.1 MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING**

## **Overview of Standard**

In accordance with the Illinois Language Equity and Access Act, IDEC will coordinate with the Governor's Office of New Americans to review and monitor the implementation of its Language Access Plan and ensure ongoing compliance with the Act.

IDECA will conduct an individualized assessment of language assistance needs and patterns of language use on an ongoing basis and incorporate updated data and performance metrics into each new iteration of the Language Access Plan, as required under Section 25(d)(3). The agency will use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and practices and to inform continuous improvement of language access services.

The plan will include the ongoing review of the relevant and applicable data on limited English proficient (LEP) populations, including demographic shifts and the identification of new or emerging language needs, as outlined in the State's Language Needs Assessment Report. The monitoring and evaluation plan will also track progress on the implementation of Language Access Plan goals, review expenditures related to language assistance services, and assess whether projected changes in costs require budget adjustments or modifications to service delivery methods. Data will be collected and reviewed using the following methods:

## **Current IDEC'S Systems and Practices**

IDECA currently does not administer programs. IDEC will work with Governor's Office of New Americans to develop monitoring, evaluating, and reporting requirements that comply with the Illinois Language Equity and Access Act.

## **SECTION 9: RESOURCES**

- Illinois Statewide Coordination Plan Draft ([Link](#))
- Illinois Language Access Toolkit