Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We are organizations that care about the health of limited English Proficient (LEP), deaf, hard-of-hearing, and DeafBlind communities, blind persons, and people who cannot rely on speech to be heard and understood. Sadly, the needs of people in these communities, who data show comprise tens of millions of individuals across the country, including children and older adults, are not being met during the COVID-19 pandemic.\(^1\) We urge you to dedicate resources and oversight to ensuring language and communications needs are not a barrier to COVID-19 public health knowledge, testing and treatment.

While civil rights laws require that the federal government and recipients of federal funding provide equal access to persons needing language and communication assistance, in practice, many entities do not. In addition, many impacted patients are unaware of their rights. Even prior to this public health crisis, these populations often received inadequate health care services. For example, research has found that people who are LEP, meaning they speak English less than very well, receive lower quality of care and experience higher rates of medical errors.\(^2\) Similarly, people who are deaf or have communication-related disabilities more often experience inadequate health care, medical errors, trouble finding medical care providers, and delay or forego medical care due to the cost and availability of services.\(^3\) When people with language and communications needs are not given equal access to information and services, health care providers may make incorrect assumptions about their symptoms, health care needs, and the value of their life.

The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) National Response Framework repeatedly calls for “ongoing clear, consistent, accessible, and culturally and linguistically appropriate

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\(^1\) The American Community Survey estimates show 25 million Limited English Proficient people in the U.S, the National Health Interview Survey estimates show 37.5 million people who report trouble hearing, CommunicationFIRST estimates 5 million people cannot rely on speech to communicate, and NIH funded research estimates one million people who are blind and 3.2 million with vision impairment.


\(^3\) Stransky, Michelle and Megan Morris, "Adults with Communication Disabilities Face Health Care Obstacles," The ASHA Leader (March 1, 2019). Available at: https://leader.pubs.asha.org/doi/10.1044/leader.FTR1.24032019.46.
communication to ensure an appropriate response.” The Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights has made it clear that the communications needs of COVID-19 patients must be respected. Yet to date, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has only translated its COVID-19 website into four languages and its print materials inconsistently. In the absence of federal resources, some states and localities have put scare resources into developing their own materials, but many have not. The race to get materials available online can lead to additional accessibility problems for people who are blind or visually impaired. Inflexible hospital visitation policies mean that interpreters and support persons are barred or face complex barriers and risks to serve patient needs. Telehealth systems are not set up to fully accommodate a diverse array of patient needs, leading to poor quality or no accessible communications options. Media outlets have reported that a lack of sufficient communications policies or resources have directly been tied to spread of the virus.

In the next legislative package addressing COVID-19, Congress must address these problems. Congress should pass legislation that:

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8 Interpreters to include ASL interpreters.
• Requires that all materials related to the pandemic are provided, in a timely way, in at least 19 written languages and American Sign Language (ASL), as recommended in the DHS Language Access Plan\(^1\), and in alternative formats such as large font print, electronic formats, Braille, fully accessible websites, and captioned and ASL videos.

• Addresses in-person communications needs, particularly at COVID-19 testing and treatment sites, including hospitals, by ensuring funding for and access to qualified interpretation services, support persons, communications boards, and other augmentative communication tools.

• Requires that contact tracing efforts, both through trained staff and digital applications, are fully available to people with diverse communications needs and that contact tracers have access to interpreters and are trained in how to work with them.

• Ensures that all patients are aware of their rights under civil rights laws, as well as how to file complaints, and that covered entities are aware of their responsibilities to ensure effective communication with all patients during the pandemic.

• Makes comprehensive data available through the collection and regular reporting of language and disability characteristics of COVID-19 cases and deaths at all testing, treatment and ultimately vaccination sites, including from institutional entities.

We appreciate the introduction of bills that cover some of these needs such as the Coronavirus Immigrant Families Protection Act (H.R. 6437/S. 3609), the COVID-19 Language Access Act (H.R. 6623), and the COVID-19 Recovery for Seniors and People with Disabilities Act (S.3740). We urge you to include these bills and the above policies in the critically-needed, next phase of COVID-19 legislation. Otherwise, millions of people will be left out, threatening our collective response.

Sincerely,

**National Organizations**

Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum  
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)  
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)  
National Health Law Program  
ACCESS  
Advocating Opportunity  
Aging Life Care Association  
Alianza Americas  
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas  
Alliance for Aging Research  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
American Association of People with Disabilities  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Council of the Blind

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
American Holisitic Nurses Credentialing Corporation
American Kidney Fund
American Lung Association
American Muslim Health Professionals
American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR)
American Physical Therapy Association
American Society of Nephrology
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
Athlete Ally
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brain Injury Association of America
Center for Disability Rights
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Center for Public Representation
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI)
Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation
Chronic Sex
Church World Service
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Coalition on Human Needs
CommunicationFIRST
Community Catalyst
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Boat People SOS
East Coast Asian American Student Union (ECAASU)
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
Epilepsy Foundation
Families USA
Farmworker Justice
First Focus Campaign for Children
Freedom Network USA
Health Resources in Action
Healthy Kinder International, LLC
Hep B United
Hepatitis B Foundation
Hispanic Federation
Hispanic Health Network
Immunization Action Coalition
International Rescue Committee
Japanese American Citizens League
Japanese American Citizens League, Idaho Falls Chapter
Justice for Migrant Women
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
Lakeshore Foundation
Laotian American National Alliance
Latino Commission on AIDS
LatinosAgainstAlzheimer's
Little Lobbyists
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Mi Familia Vota
MomsRising
NAACP
NASTAD
National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Alliance for Safe Housing
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
National Association of State Long Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Association Social Workers
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans - NCAPA
National Council of Gray Panthers Networks
National Council on Aging
National Council on Independent living
National Council on Interpreting in Health Care
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Immigration Law Center
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)
National REACH Coalition
National WIC Association
National Women's Health Network
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
Our Mother's Voice
Papa Ola Lokahi
Prevention Institute
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Progressive Doctors
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)
Public Citizen
Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
SHK Global Health
Sojourners
SPLC Action Fund
Tahirih Justice Center
The Arc of the United States
The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation
The Forum for Youth Investment
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The Trevor Project
Treatment Action Group
UnidosUS
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Voices for Progress
Whitman-Walker Institute
Young Invincibles

State and Local Organizations
Alabama
¡HICA! Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama
Etowah Visitation Project, a member organization of Freedom for Immigrants

Arizona
Asian Pacific Community in Action
Children's Action Alliance
Japanese American Citizens League, Arizona Chapter
The Arc of Arizona
William E. Morris Institute for Justice
California
Alliance for a Better Community
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles
Asian Resources, Inc
California Center for Rural Policy
California Commission on Aging
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
Cambodia Town, Inc.
Casa San Jose
Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants
Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO)
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Community Health Councils
Exceptional Parents Unlimited
Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries
Healthy House Within A MATCH Coalition
Hmong Innovating Politics, HIP
Japanese American Citizens' League, Sacramento Chapter
Japanese American Citizens League, San Jose Chapter
Korean Community Center of the East Bay
Latino Coalition for a Healthy CA
LIFE ElderCare
Little Tokyo Service Center
liz.logsdon@disabilityrightsca.org
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank
Mid-City CAN (Community Advocacy Network)
Multi-Ethnic Collaborative of Community Agencies
NICOS Chinese Health Coalition
Pacific Asian Counseling Services
Proteus Inc.
SAAHAS For Cause
San Diego Planning Partnership
Services, Immigrant Rights & Education Network (SIREN)
Street Level Health Project
Support for Families
Thai Community Development Center
The Cambodian Family Community Center
The Children's Partnership
Union Station Homeless Services
United Cambodian Community
Colorado Children's Campaign
THRIVE Center
Connecticut
Amplify, Inc.

District of Columbia
Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc

Florida
Florida Legal Services, Inc

Georgia
Healthy Savannah
Parent to Parent of Georgia

Hawaii
Hawaii Families As Allies
Hawaii Health & Harm Reduction Center
Hep Free Hawaii
Lanai Community Health Center

Idaho
Centro de Comunidad y Justicia
Idaho Parents Unlimited

Illinois
AIDS Foundation Chicago
JACL Chicago
Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Iowa
EMBARC

Kentucky
Kentucky Equal Justice Center

Maine
Disability Rights Maine
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project

Maryland
Public Justice Center
The Parents’ Place of MD
Voices for Quality Care (LTC), Inc.
Massachusetts
Rian Immigrant Center

Michigan
Center for Civil Justice
Michigan Long Term Care Ombudsman Program

Minnesota
Asian American Organizing Project (AAOP)

Mississippi
Mississippi Center for Justice

Nebraska
Nebraska Appleseed

New Jersey
Family Voices NJ
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center

New Mexico
New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty
Parents Reaching Out
Santa Fe Mutual Aid
Southwest Women's Law Center

New York
Asian American Federation
Bronx Health REACH
Bronx-Westchester AHEC
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Chinese American Planning Council
Christopher Rose Community Empowerment Campaign
church alive development corp
Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Community Food Advocates
FPWA
Korean Community Services of Metropolitan NY
Neighbors In Support of Immigrants
New York Immigration Coalition
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Pathhseo,Inc.
The Church of God of Prophecy, Bronx NY
The Point CDC
United Business Cooperative
We All Rise

North Carolina
Equality North Carolina

Ohio
Dayton Chapter Japanese American Citizens League
Ohio Asian American Health Coalition

Oregon
APANO
FACT Oregon
Portland Chapter JACL

Pennsylvania
Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (CARIE)
Community Legal Services of Philadelphia
Japanese American Citizens League Philadelphia Chapter
Terri Lynch-Kenyon - LTC citizen advocate

South Carolina
Family Connection of South Carolina
South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center
South Dakota Parent Connection

Tennessee
Tennessee Justice Center

Texas
Every Texan (formerly CPPP)
The Immunization Partnership
VN TeamWork, Inc.

Texas
Voices for Utah Children

Washington
Asian Counseling and Referral Service
International Community Health Services
Open Doors for Multicultural Families
PAVE Family Voices Washington
WA PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment)
West Virginia
WV Parent Training and Information Inc.