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Community and Advocacy Groups Commend Nassau County Executive Orders Guaranteeing Translation and Interpretation Services to Nassau Residents:

Nassau's new policy modeled on similar policies in New York State, Suffolk County, and New York City

Mineola, NY – In an important step towards ensuring good government in Nassau County, County Executive Ed Mangano signed a second of two Executive Orders today guaranteeing translation and interpretation services to all limited-English proficient (LEP) residents in their interactions with County Government. Recent emergency and relief efforts have brought into stark relief the importance of the county agencies being able to communicate effectively and efficiently with all Nassau County residents, including the more than 130,000 county residents with limited ability to read, write, or speak English.

The two Nassau County Executive Orders (numbers 67 and 72) align Nassau County with Suffolk County and New York State's similar executive orders in 2011 and 2012 that guaranteed such language assistance services, and make Nassau one of the first suburban counties in the United States to enact a comprehensive language access policy. These Orders will bring significant public safety gains to the county and improve all agencies' ability to interact with Nassau's diverse population. Under the provisions of the Order, all county agencies will, among other things, be required to:

- Translate essential public documents and forms into the top six languages spoken by LEP residents of Nassau County—namely, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, Persian, Korean, and French Creole
- Provide interpretation services to all LEP Nassau residents;
- Designate a language access coordinator and draft plans for complying with this Executive Order in the next 120 days; and
- Refrain from using language access services use as a basis for inquiring about, or sharing, immigration status.

Representatives of various organizations that have worked with the County to ensure improved language access services and achieve these Executive Orders cheered the signing and expressed their commitment to working with the County to ensure effective implementation:

Maria Cordoba, a member of Make the Road New York and Westbury resident, said, "I recently went to the County Department of Social Services, and finding out that no one in the staff spoke Spanish, I had to leave without being served. Make the Road New York is excited about these two orders and the commitment they demonstrate to limited-English proficient residents."

Cheryl Keshner, coordinator of Long Island Language Advocates Coalition and senior paralegal at the Empire Justice Center, stated: “We applaud the signing of these executive orders. As evidenced by Hurricane Sandy, it is essential that all members of our community have equal and timely access to government services, especially during times of crisis.”

Daniel Altschuler, Coordinator of the Long Island Civic Engagement Table, affirmed “These two Executive Orders together are critical for ensuring good government in Nassau County. We are thrilled that Nassau will now become one of the first suburban counties in the United States to guarantee language access in county agencies, and we look forward to continuing to work with the County administration to ensure effective implementation.”

Shena Elrington, Director of Health Justice at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, said: “The signing of these two executive orders marks a civil rights victory for limited English proficient residents of Nassau County, who will now be able to meaningfully access government services. These EOs reflect a commitment to ensuring access for every resident, regardless of the language he or she speaks.”

“Today Nassau County joins a growing movement in New York and across the country to break down language barriers between immigrant communities and their local governments,” said Nisha Agarwal, Deputy Director at the Center for Popular Democracy. “These executive orders will make it possible for residents with limited English proficiency to access the services they need to take care of themselves and their families, and will help create a healthier, safer, more economically robust Nassau county for all.”

“Today, Nassau County takes an important step forward in ensuring equal access to critical services such as police and emergency assistance, medical care, and important information such as public health and safety notices,” said Jason Starr, Director of the Nassau County Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union. “These orders celebrate both the linguistic and cultural diversity that make our community special and the spirit of tolerance and diversity embodied in the Constitution.”

Martha Maffei, Executive Director at Services for the Advancement of Women (SEPA Mujer) stated “In my daily work with immigrant women escaping domestic abuse, language access is crucial for women who are seeking services for themselves, as well as for their families. I congratulate Nassau County for providing the tool that victims of domestic violence need to look forward in their lives.”

“As Nassau County becomes more and more diverse, these Executive Orders will help ensure that all of our residents have access to important services, and can participate in community life,” said Anita Halasz, Organizer with Long Island Jobs with Justice.

Delbys Torres, member organizer for La Fuente and resident of Freeport said, “We applaud Nassau County for committing to provide access to language services to thousands of residents in all county interactions, not just in a select few. We encourage them to continue to find ways of ensuring that Nassau County is a place who provides equal opportunity and access to services regardless of language barriers. It is a great day when government goes beyond what is legal under the law, but what is just and critical to ensure that our government is truly democratic and open to all.”

“These orders will assure that all parents are better informed about available services and, in turn, how to help their children succeed,” said Johanna Rotta, Coordinator of Community Assets at the Early Years Institute.

“The Nassau County Language Access Executive Orders will help Limited-English Proficient consumers with disabilities to have a better quality of life, to live more independently and to participate more in their community,” said Grisselle Rivera-Mucciolo, Director of Hispanic Outreach at the Long Island Center for Independent Living.