



MARJORIE LANDA
DEPUTY COMPTROLLER FOR
AUDIT

CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

BUREAU OF AUDIT

June 28, 2019

By Electronic Mail

Loree Sutton
Commissioner
New York City Department of Veterans' Services
1 Centre Street, Room 2208
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Letter Report on the New York City Department of Veterans' Services'
Compliance with Local Law 25 of 2016 Regarding Translation of Agency Website
(Audit #SZ19-116AL)**

Dear Commissioner Sutton:

This Letter Report concerns the New York City Comptroller's audit of the New York City Department of Veterans' Services' (DVS') compliance with Local Law 25, which governs the translation of websites of New York City agencies. The objective of this audit was to determine whether DVS is complying with Local Law 25, which is intended to make City agencies, and ultimately the City as a whole, more accessible to foreign-born residents whose primary language is not English. Our audit of DVS is one in a series of audits we are conducting on the City's compliance with Local Law 25.

Background

New York City, with a population of more than 8.5 million people, is home to one of the most diverse populations in the world, with more than 3.2 million foreign-born residents from more than 200 countries. According to the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP), nearly one-half of all New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home, and almost 25 percent of City residents age five and over, or 1.8 million persons, are not proficient in English. For individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), interacting with City government can often be a challenge.¹

Most City agencies have a significant presence on the internet and rely on agency websites to both provide information to and interact with the public. Accordingly, in 2016, Mayor de Blasio signed Local Law 25, amending the City's Administrative Code in relation

¹ Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, "State of Our Immigrant City" annual report, March 2018; New York City Department of City Planning <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/about/language-access.page>

to citizens' ability to access translation of City websites. Local Law 25 requires that every website maintained by or on behalf of a City agency include a translation service enabling users to view the text of that website, wherever practicable, in languages other than English. It also requires that the translation service be identifiable in a manner that is comprehensible to speakers of the seven most commonly spoken languages in the city. As determined by DCP, the seven most commonly spoken languages in New York City amongst residents with limited English proficiency are:

- 1) Spanish
- 2) Chinese (includes Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese and Formosan)
- 3) Russian
- 4) Bengali
- 5) Haitian Créole
- 6) Korean
- 7) Arabic

Thereafter, with the City's enactment of Local Law 30 of 2017, as of July 1, 2017 through the present, all City agencies that provide direct public services or emergency services, including DVS, must develop and implement Language Access Plans, in consultation with the Mayor's Office of the Language Services Coordinator and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, that include translation and interpretation services in the top 10 LEP languages—the 6 designated by DCP and 4 others determined by the Mayor's Office of the Language Services Coordinator, based on language access data collected by the City Department of Education.² DVS' Language Access Plan accordingly adopted Local Law 30's 10-LEP language standard for purposes of providing direct public access via translation services through its website. The 10 designated Citywide in New York City among residents with limited English proficiency are:

- 1) Spanish
- 2) Chinese (includes Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese and Formosan)
- 3) Russian
- 4) Bengali
- 5) Haitian Créole
- 6) Korean
- 7) Arabic
- 8) Urdu
- 9) French
- 10) Polish

² Local Law 30 of 2017 is codified at Title 23, Chapter 11 and at section 23-301 of the New York City Administrative Code and in amendments to sections 15(c) and 18(b), of the City Charter.

DVS works with City, State, and federal agencies, as well as regional private and not-for-profit partners, to improve the lives of all New York City veterans and their families. DVS seeks to ensure that homeless veterans have permanent housing and access to support services needed to find and maintain their homes; expand education and career opportunities for veterans; and provide information for the veterans and their families to gain citywide access to benefits, resources, and care. DVS states that it is committed to supporting overall mental wellness, addressing the full impact of war and military service on veterans.

The objective of this audit was to determine whether DVS is complying with Local Law 25, which is intended to make City agencies' services more accessible to immigrants and non-English speakers through translations of its websites.

Findings and Recommendation

Our audit found that DVS generally complies with Local Law 25. DVS' website, found at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/index.page> includes a translation feature for viewing text and essential information in various languages, including the above-noted top 10 languages. DVS' website also provides important information regarding its functions and services, which includes, but is not limited to, information pertaining to DVS' various divisions, office locations, contact information, forms, brochures, caregiver information, funeral and burials, and mental health aids. All essential information can be translated and viewed in each of the top 10 noted languages.

DVS' most frequently requested documents can be translated and downloaded in the 10 most-requested languages according to DVS' Language Access Plan 2018 (Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Bengali, Haitian Créole, Korean, Arabic, Urdu, French, and Polish).³ We reviewed and successfully translated the following documents into DVS' 10 most requested languages:

- Caregivers
- Ending Veterans Homelessness
- Engagement
- Funerals Honors and Burials
- Get Help
- Mental Health First Aid
- Mentor A Veteran
- Veterans on Campus

³ City agencies determine which documents are key, essential, frequently used and translated on City websites in the top languages for each agency's business purposes.

DVS provides translation and interpretation services in all of its locations that interact with the general public, including its five Borough Business Centers located in Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

Our findings are outlined in the following table entitled Compliance Summary.

COMPLIANCE SUMMARY		
Criteria	Compliance	Notes
Website translates into the top 10 most commonly spoken languages. (As required by Local Law 25 of 2016 and Local Law 30 of 2017)	Yes	We reviewed and successfully translated the website text in all 10 noted languages. DVS' website also has a "Translate This Page" feature, which enables translation of DVS' website text into more than 100 languages.
Website translates essential documents into the top 10 most commonly spoken languages. Key documents translate into DVS' top 10 most requested languages of residents with limited English proficiency. (As prescribed by DVS' standards) ⁴	Yes	We reviewed and successfully translated DVS' essential information into the top 10 noted languages and translated key documents into DVS' 10 most requested languages of residents with limited English proficiency.

We recommend that DVS continue to maintain its compliance with Local Law 25 to ensure it effectively meets the needs of residents with limited English proficiency when accessing city services online.

Scope and Methodology

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was conducted in accordance with the audit responsibilities of the City Comptroller as set forth in Chapter 5, §93, of the New York City Charter.

⁴ DVS continuously reviews the translations requested for its documents on its website. Based upon usage, DVS will decide if the translation of a brochure/document should be continued in any specific language

The scope period for this audit was May 29, 2019 through June 10, 2019, the last day of our fieldwork. Our methodology for this audit consisted of the following steps:

- We reviewed applicable laws, rules, policies and procedures to determine our criteria in accordance with Local Law 25.
- We reviewed applicable laws, rules, policies and procedures to determine our criteria in accordance with Local Law 30.
- We researched and determined the 10 designated Citywide languages in the City among residents with limited English proficiency, as determined by the Department of City Planning, the Mayor's Office of Language Services Coordinator, and data collected by the city Department of Education.
- We reviewed and analyzed DVS' website and tested its ability to translate documents into the top 10 most commonly spoken languages for residents with limited English proficiency.
- We reviewed and analyzed DVS' June 2018 Language Access Plan to determine what steps DVS took to comply with Local Law 25.
- We reviewed the Language Access Plan to determine which documents DVS deemed essential for the agency to provide direct public services and that needed to be translated.
- We reviewed and analyzed whether DVS' essential documents and forms could be downloaded on the website, and tested whether they translate to the 10 most commonly spoken languages for residents with limited English proficiency.

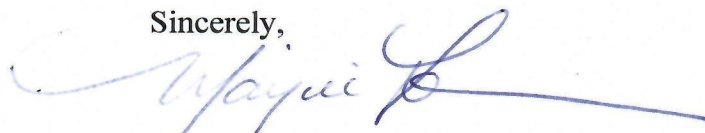
Based on our understanding of the Local Law 25 and Local Law 30 requirements, we outlined all the criteria necessary for agencies to be in compliance. The table below outlines agencies' core criteria required to achieve compliance under Local Law 25 and Local Law 30. A summary of these core criteria forms the basis for the compliance summary reported for each audited agency.

CORE CRITERIA	
Compliance	Detailed Criteria
Spanish	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Spanish
Chinese	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Chinese
Russian	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Russian
Bengali	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Bengali
French Créole (Haitian Créole)	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in French Créole/Haitian Créole
Korean	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Korean
Arabic	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Arabic
Urdu	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Urdu
French	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in French
Polish	Agency's website includes a translation feature for viewing text, essential information and key documents in Polish

The matters covered in this letter report were discussed with DVS officials during and at the conclusion of this audit. DVS officials were notified of our findings during the course of the audit and agreed that an exit conference was not necessary. On June 14, 2019, we submitted a draft letter report to DVS with a request for comments. We received a written response from DVS on June 27, 2019. In its response, DVS agreed with the audit's findings and recommendation, stating, "DVS will maintain its compliance with Local Law 25 to ensure that residents with limited English proficiency can effectively navigate the NYC Department of Veterans' Services."

The full text of DVS' comments is included as an addendum to this report.

Sincerely,



Marjorie Landa

c: Jeffrey Roth, Deputy Commissioner, DVS

Jason Parker, Assistant Commissioner, Operations and Admin Services, DVS

Ellen Greeley, Chief of Staff, DVS

Karen Chan, Compliance Officer, DVS

Jeff Thamkittikasem, Director, Mayor's Office of Operations

George Davis III, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Operations



Loree Sutton, MD
COMMISSIONER

Jeffrey Roth
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

June 19, 2019

Ms. Marjorie Landa
Deputy Comptroller for Audit
Office of the Comptroller, Bureau of Audit
Municipal Building
1 Centre Street, Room 100
New York, NY 10007

SUBJECT: Draft Letter Report on the New York City Department of Veteran's Services' Compliance with Local Law 25 of 2016 Regarding Translation of Agency Website (Audit #SZ19-116AL)

Deputy Comptroller Landa:

The New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) is in receipt of your Draft Letter Audit Report dated June 14, 2019, pertaining to the audit done on DVS's compliance with Local Law 25 Regarding Translation of Agency Website (Audit #SZ19-116AL).

DVS has received the report and the *Findings and Recommendations* and thanks the Office of the Comptroller for its finding that DVS generally complies with Local Law 25. DVS' website includes a translation feature for viewing text and essential information in various languages, including the above-noted top 10 languages. DVS' website also provides important information pertaining to DVS' various divisions, office locations, contact information, forms, brochures, caregiver information, funeral and burials, and mental health aids. All essential information can be translated and viewed in each of the top 10 noted languages.

DVS will maintain its compliance with Local Law 25 to ensure that residents with limited English proficiency can effectively navigate the NYC Department of Veterans' Services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "LSH", written over a horizontal line.

Loree Sutton, MD
Brigadier General, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Commissioner

Cc: Ernestine M. Rivers, Audit Manager, Office of the New York City Comptroller
Jeffrey Roth, Deputy Commissioner, NYC Department of Veterans Services
Jason Parker, Assistant Commissioner of Operations, NYC Department of Veterans' Services
George Davis III, Director of Audit Services, Mayor's Office of Operations

Connect with us!



@NYCVeterans
www.nyc.gov/vets

1 Centre St, 22nd Floor, Ste 2208
New York, NY 10007
P: 212 416 5250
F: 212 312 0950