

## **DHS announces new contracts for language assistance services**

As DHS continues to reach out to – and receive inquiries from – residents whose primary language is not English, methods for enhancing communication become increasingly important. In order to meet the language needs of Allegheny County’s changing population, the Immigrants and Internationals Initiative, part of DHS Integrated Program Services, led a department-wide Request for Proposals (RFP) process to secure agreements with qualified providers for interpretation and translation services. From that RFP, Echo International, Optimal Phone Interpreters (OPI), and Pittsburgh Language Access Network (PLAN – an initiative of the Center for Hearing and Deaf Services) have been contracted to provide language services to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) receiving information or services from DHS.

“As the number of foreign-born individuals in Allegheny County increases and DHS sees more individuals with LEP throughout the Department, we want to make sure we are taking steps to provide services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate,” said Andy Smith, program specialist for the Immigrants and Internationals Initiative. “After a department-wide review and consultation with experts, DHS decided to create a centralized, standardized arrangement where all program offices receive the same high-quality language services at the same costs. We are excited to streamline this process to meet the needs of consumers with LEP more efficiently and effectively.”

DHS staff may secure interpretation and translation services from these new agreements once they determine that an individual with LEP needs assistance to communicate in a meaningful way, or when an individual requests language services directly. Determining the appropriate service will be based on urgency and the nature of the interaction: for in-person interpretation, the staff member may choose between Echo and PLAN; however, all telephone interpretation and written translation services will be conducted by OPI. Staff members should note that there are some cases where a combination of services and providers may be necessary.

The Immigrants and Internationals Initiative staff plans to offer presentations on the new language services and related policies beginning in the fall. Staff members with questions concerning the providers or language needs are encouraged to contact Andy at [andrew.smith@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:andrew.smith@alleghenycounty.us).