

TESTIMONY OF CHRIS LONG
BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY
RE: INTRO. 673-2015 / CITY WEBSITE TRANSLATION
RE: INTRO. 683-2015 / ACCESSIBLE CITY WEBSITES
MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2015

Good morning Chair Vacca and members of the Committee on Technology. My name is Chris Long and I am the Assistant Commissioner for Web Strategy and Operations at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, or DoITT. I am joined by Azedah Khalili from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, and Christian Valle and Walei Sabry from the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity today to discuss Intro. 673, which would require City agency websites to include options for translating their text into languages other than English; and Intro. 683, which would require City agency websites to be accessible for persons with disabilities, and for the City Commission on Human Rights to report annually an analysis of the City's progress toward this aim.

Equitable access to all City services is a cornerstone of the de Blasio Administration's approach to governance, and so I will begin by saying that the goal of these two bills speaks directly to that ideal. We have been and remain fully committed to making New York City a fairer, more just and more equitable city for every resident across every borough, and that extends to the City's digital presence as much as it does to any tangible service we deliver.

The City's digital strategy is shaped around the goal of connecting with New Yorkers where they are online, across a number of platforms. To ensure full and equitable access to City services and allow New Yorkers to interact directly with government resources, it is essential that digital resources are accessible regardless of language or disability.

To that end, we are constantly working on accessibility and pursuing improvements where they are required. And we have made a lot of progress in the digital space. As it applies to websites in particular, *NYC.gov*, the official website of the City of New York, is in many ways the City's digital face to the world. Home to the websites of more than 125 City agencies, entities, initiatives, and organizations, *NYC.gov* hosts roughly 45 million unique visitors viewing nearly 800 million pages of content each year. Additionally, many government agencies provide information across various different platforms, including mobile applications, social media, and targeted alerts.

Along with NYC Digital, DoITT is now working with agencies across the City to redesign their websites to match the recently-re-launched *NYC.gov* home page which, at a click, provides language translations in approximately 90 different languages.

Language translation is achieved on *NYC.gov* today using the widely-available, free Google translate solution, which is helpful for the vast majority of day to day materials. We have also taken measures to ensure that popular City sites not on the *NYC.gov* domain – such as NYC OpenData, which serves as the central repository for official,

machine-readable City data sets – are accessible to people with disabilities and can support languages other than English as required.

The current standard can translate into over 90 languages. As many of us have experienced, these technologies are far from perfect but have improved at a rapid rate over the last few years and continue to get better. We see this as short-term solution and in the long run, our vision is for every agency to translate essential parts of their web pages into the top languages spoken by their constituencies.

In January 2015, the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs launched a comprehensive program to strengthen the City’s approach to language access. The program is overseen by a new Executive Director for Language Access Initiatives, Azadeh Khalili, who is with me here today. Under Ms. Khalili’s direction, the program includes five important elements:

1. Each agency has designated a senior staff person who is responsible for ensuring that all material produced by that agency, including digital materials, are available in a wide array of languages.
2. The creation of a language access cabinet within City agencies working with the senior staff member serving in the role of Language Access Coordinator to implement the agency Language Access Plan.
3. Cross-agency language access network that meets monthly for trainings, technical assistance and sharing of best practices (each meeting is attended by senior staff, general counsels, directors of communications, directors of personnel, etc.).
4. Every public-facing agency now has a contract with a vendor for translation and interpretation services.
5. A new protocol for Language Access quality assurance and customer complaints has been established and New Yorkers who may receive inadequate language access services at City agencies can now register a complaint using 311. Agencies are required to follow up on each complaint and report the resolution to the Mayor’s Office under strict new guidelines.

In terms of translation of written materials, vital documents are translated by certified bilingual agency staff or outside vendors.

The Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) maintains a team of 1200 volunteers to review documents that have already been translated by agency staff or vendors and to provide as needed translation services for short documents. This team has translated well over 500 (575) documents since the beginning of this administration and provides an essential element of quality control and timeliness of translation services.

For emergency written communications, the NYC Office of Emergency Management relies on manual translation services by staff or vendors to ensure that messages in

languages other than English disseminated in a manner that is accurate, timely, and culturally appropriate. For example, OEM translated many documents and written messages into Spanish immediately following the tragic East Harlem Building Explosion in March 2014 and is prepared to do so again when necessary.

Across its various social media pages, the City maintains a number of different language options as well. The City's official Facebook and Twitter pages are available in Spanish. Additionally, many agencies and city-affiliated entities have specific accounts in non-English. The predominantly English language accounts also send out messages in other languages depending on the occasion.

A number of the Administration's key initiatives also have robust language access components:

Applications for ID NYC are available on the City's website in 25 languages. Since the launch of the Muni ID program, 311 has received well over 210,984 calls about IDNYC, and an analysis performed in March found that 52 percent of calls regarding IDNYC were in a language other than English – with Spanish accounting for approximately 90 percent of those calls – which is by far the most non-English language 311 calls for any City program since the launch of the 311 system 12 years ago. New Yorkers can use the Muni ID website to make an appointment in Spanish or Chinese (accounting for the vast majority of users) and can access interpretation services for whatever language they speak at the appointment centers.

The new *NYC.gov* also provides a range of tools available to New Yorkers with disabilities.

The tools available on City websites follow guidelines provided by the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. These steps include:

- Heading structures: Proper h1, h2, h3 headings are very helpful for navigating. It allows users of screen readers to jump straight to their desired content. Otherwise, they would have to listen to the entire page contents in order to get to the info they want to know
- Alt-tags for images: Any pictures, logos or images should be described by using alt-tags. Alt-tags are descriptions that will not appear visually but will be read by the screen reader. Examples are NYC logo, Picture of Madison Square Park or picture of George Bush Senior signing the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Proper use of tables: Tables should not be used to set the layout of a webpage. Tables should only be used to display tabular data. Information such as schedules and search results are examples of types of data that belong in tables.
- Links should be clearly labeled. Avoid vague link labels such as “click here” or “this link.” Specific labels should be used.
- Keyboard access: All links, buttons and form controls should have keyboard access. This means that a user should be able to get to every link, button, or form field using only the tab button on the keyboard.

- Skip to links: A skip to navigation and skip to content links should be at the very top of each page and should take the visitor to the appropriate area of the page when activated.
- Videos: links and buttons that activate videos should be clearly labeled Close Captioning: All videos provided by city websites should provide Close Captioning.
- Attachment/Downloadable Documentations: Should be available in multiple formats - Readable PDF, HTML or Word document.
- Accessible Features on all City Websites: All city websites should have a designated location for accessible features. This helps people who use magnification software to easily identify the desired feature. Some features may be: Text Sizing or Color Contrast.
- Automatic page/background refresh: avoid automatic page refresh because for many visitors it can confuse them or displace their focus. For a blind visitor, when a page refreshes, it takes the focus back to the top of the page. This experience can be frustrating and act as an obstacle that keeps the visitor from the content that is relevant
- Color: Avoid using green and red for significant elements of the page. If something important is green or red, try to indicate its significance with a symbol such as an asterisk for color blind visitors.
- Using ARIA: Accessible Rich Internet Applications (ARIA) can be used to enhance the accessibility of a webpage. For example ARIA labels can be used to add labels to form fields that would be read by screen readers. For blind visitors, these ARIA labels act as an equivalent of the visual labels that appear next to each form field. ARIA can also be used to direct the focus of screen readers to pop-ups or modal dialogues. This is important because pop-ups and modal dialogues are not recognized by screen readers. When this happens a blind user would not realize that a pop-up or dialogue has appeared on the screen unless the screen reader shifts its focus to it.

Of course, the way in which people digitally interact with City government today is not limited to websites alone. Therefore, as part of the City's Digital Engagement Strategy we are committed to engaging with New Yorkers in the ways in which they choose to communicate with the City, be it through more traditional digital channels like email or texting, or newer social media or social sharing type tools. Each of these platforms presents distinct challenges yet it remains our goal that each be accessible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. From websites to Twitter feeds, text messages to targeted notifications, New Yorkers – regardless of the language they speak or their differing abilities – are entitled to every offering New York City provides, and we remain committed to improving upon our efforts still.

And as we have described, the de Blasio Administration sees it as a fundamental responsibility of government to ensure full access to services and information, and is excited to be working on a number of fronts to do just that.

Thank you again. We look forward to answering any questions you may have.

