



INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL  
INTERPRETERS ASSOCIATION  
Leading the advancement of professional interpreters

April 6, 2020

The White House  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President,

I write to you today with grave concerns regarding the safety of healthcare interpreters and patients with Limited English proficiency (LEP).

We have received highly disturbing reports regarding on-site medical interpreters not being afforded access to safety and protective equipment and protocols consistent with such materials as are being provided to other equal professional healthcare providers providing critically necessary services on the front lines of our country's war against the pandemic. First and above all, we hereby beseech you to consider the unquestionable and unnecessary risks to all Americans posed by this inequity, not only to the medical interpreters fighting to provide continuing services to those in need, but also to their families and each of their respective larger communities.

We, The International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) are also concerned about language access. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, confirmed and expanded by Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, prohibits discrimination based on national origin, which includes language. In the past few weeks, we have received reports from interpreters in the field, alleging multiple instances of Limited English Proficient (LEP) patients receiving substandard, potentially life-threatening barriers to adequate healthcare services due to language barriers. On behalf of the IMIA and our national network of constituent service providers, together with the medical institutions and patients that we serve, we are contacting you to respectfully request the administration's support and assistance in ensuring that any and all reasonable measures are put in place to safely provide needed language access to LEP patients, ensuring the same standard of care for all patients, thereby reducing the potential related epidemiological risks across all facets of American society.

Although in-person interpreters are a crucially important part of the medical services offered by hospitals and urgent care health clinics, we also encourage the full use and employment of modern technology to bridge applicable language gaps. Over-the-phone interpreting (OPI) and video remote interpreting (VRI) are proving especially useful in this crisis and should be fielded as widely as possible. Using remote technology to provide interpreting services will minimize overcrowding of health care staff, thereby directly minimizing related risks of COVID-19 transmissions.

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We turn to you in this dire time for our nation and the world, for your leadership to guide the nation's officers and staff to ensure that medical interpretation professionals in the field can continue to provide critically necessary services as safely as possible, and that our LEP population can be protected as effectively and efficiently as all patients.

In keeping with the foregoing expressed concerns and related recommendations, the IMIA respectfully recommends a Presidential emergency executive order "Protecting Civil Rights During Covid-19 Pandemic". An executive order will guide health care personnel, health care systems, Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and other related agencies to adhere to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and to provide language access services, interpreting services to all limited English proficient patients, Deaf and hearing-impaired patients, and to any other patients with functional needs, whenever and wherever possible.

By issuing this emergency executive order and guidance during this important time, you will ensure that history remembers you as the President that cared for the wellbeing of all Americans regardless of their race, religion, and national origin.

In turn, we are ready and willing to support every effort that your administration establishes regarding the compliance of civil rights during this pandemic, and to ensure that your executive order and directive is implemented at and enforced at every level.

With sincerest gratitude for your time and attention, please don't hesitate to reach me at [President@imiaweb.org](mailto:President@imiaweb.org) with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

David Cardona, MD, MPH, CMI-Spanish  
IMIA President, on behalf of the Board of Directors

CC: William Barr, US Attorney General  
Alex Azar, Director, Health and Human Services

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