



TRANSFORMING LIVES &
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES
SINCE 1973

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Dear President and Councilmembers, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Sean Heyneman, and I work with Ayuda's Language Access Program, which operates the Community Legal Interpreter Bank—CLIB—under contract with the County's Department of Health and Human Services. I'm here to respectfully urge you to allocate an additional **\$20,000** in the FY27 operating budget to sustain and expand critical language access for Deaf and limited-English-proficient Montgomery County residents.

At this perilous moment, language access is not an "extra." It is what makes due process real. When a client cannot communicate with their lawyer in real time because they do not speak the same language, the consequences can be immediate and irreversible—missed court dates, avoidable evictions, loss of custody, or the loss of a chance to remain in this country safely with family.

Since 2013, Montgomery County has invested in CLIB to ensure pro bono and public-interest attorneys can serve residents who are Deaf or speak languages other than English—at no cost to the legal service providers or their clients. That investment works: over the past 13 years, CLIB has delivered **1,569** interpretation assignments and translated **536** documents for low-income County residents.

The need is large: about **154,000** County residents over age five are limited- or non-English proficient, and thousands more have hearing difficulty and may use a sign language. CLIB's core strength is a vetted network of **135** local professional interpreters working in **35** languages, including Spanish, Amharic, French, Arabic, Dari, Pashto, and American Sign Language. These interpreters are trained for out-of-court legal settings—confidentiality, legal terminology, and attorney-client privilege—so attorneys can do their jobs effectively and ethically.

With County support, CLIB provides interpreters for remote and in-person meetings so residents can complete immigration filings, seek protection from abuse, stabilize housing, resolve family-law matters, and understand high-stakes legal options—regardless of which language they use. CLIB also provides document translation—intake forms, Know Your Rights materials, client statements, and essential records—so residents can understand what they're signing and attorneys can reach communities in their languages.

CLIB currently partners with **30** civil legal service organizations across the County. Ayuda handles the logistics—recruiting, scheduling, quality control, and payment—so attorneys can focus on representation. Our partners consistently tell us that professional interpretation and translation are essential to accurate client statements, safer reporting, and fair outcomes. We are proud of what CLIB has achieved with the Council's support—but demand and costs have outpaced the current contract. In FY25, interpretation and translation for Montgomery County residents cost about **\$36,000**—more than **\$15,000** above the budgeted amount in our DHHS contract. Ayuda absorbed that gap by leaning on other funding sources, but this is not sustainable if we want to keep these services reliable and responsive.



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An additional **\$20,000** would let CLIB do two concrete things: **(1) keep pace with demand** for scheduled legal interpretation and document translation, so providers are not turned away when cases surge; and **(2) add on-demand telephonic interpreting** for urgent, short calls. With just **\$5,000** of the increase, we can provide on-demand phone interpretation for at least **350** calls per year—exactly the kind of rapid communication that can prevent an imminent eviction, respond to a sudden detention, or file an emergency protective order when hours matter.

This is a modest investment with outsized impact: it strengthens due process, improves public safety, and helps residents resolve crises before they escalate. I respectfully ask you to make language access a budget priority by allocating an additional **\$20,000** to DHHS for Ayuda's Community Legal Interpreter Bank in FY27.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sean Heyneman
Language Access Manager, Database Operations
Ayuda