

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 30, 2025

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, D.C. 20554

Zenji Nakazawa
Acting Bureau Chief, FCC Bureau of
Public Safety and Homeland Security
45 L Street NE
Washington, D.C. 20554

Chairman Carr and Acting Bureau Chief Nakazawa:

As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) prepares for its upcoming Hurricane Season Resiliency Roundtable, we urge you to include language access experts and advocates who serve communities with limited English proficiency (LEP). Public safety communications that fail to address language needs leave millions of people vulnerable, and no resiliency framework is complete without closing this gap.

Nearly 68 million United States residents speak a language other than English at home, and over 25 million are classified as LEP.¹ During hurricanes and other disasters, these individuals face significant, documented barriers to accessing emergency alerts, evacuation orders, and disaster recovery information in a language that they can understand. These challenges are not hypothetical—they have played out in real time during recent disasters, with serious and sometimes deadly consequences.

In Houston, for example, nearly half a million residents have limited or no English proficiency, and the city is home to more than 145 spoken languages.² When Hurricane Beryl tore through Houston last year, significant portions of the city's LEP community reported feeling unprepared, as most emergency resources were available in English and Spanish but not other languages spoken by a large number of residents.³ This is

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Language Spoken at Home: 2021 American Community Survey. 2021, [https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=language%20spoken%20at%20home&tid=ACST1Y2021.S1601.](https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=language%20spoken%20at%20home&tid=ACST1Y2021.S1601.;); Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. "Limited English Proficiency (LEP)." *CMS.gov*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/MLN/WBT/MLN2059239-Language-Access-Plans/lap/lesson01/04-Limited-English-Proficiency-LEP/index.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20U.S.%20Census.%2C%20write%2C%20or%20understand%20English.>

² Houston Public Media. "How Prepared You Are for the Next Big Storm Might Have Something to Do with the Language You Speak." Houston Public Media, 8 Aug. 2024, <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/shows/houston-matters/2024/08/08/496065/how-prepared-you-are-for-the-next-big-storm-might-have-something-to-do-with-the-language-you-speak/>.

³ Kaiser Family Foundation. "Understanding Inequitable Impacts of Hurricanes and Other Natural Disasters in the Wake of Hurricanes Helene and Milton." KFF, 2024, <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/understanding-inequitable-impacts-hurricanes-other-natural-disasters->

particularly alarming as Harris County, where Houston is located, scores a 100/100 or “very high” for hurricane risk on the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s National Risk Index.⁴

The State of Florida, another hurricane hotspot, boasts over 4.8 million foreign-born residents who speak more than 130 languages.⁵ More than 400,000 households in Florida speak Haitian Creole as their primary language, and tens of thousands more primarily speak Portuguese, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Arabic, German, Russian, Italian, or another language.⁶ Communicating effectively with these diverse populations is a complex undertaking—particularly for rural, agricultural counties in north central Florida, which often operate with limited resources. Many of these counties lack in-house interpreters or multilingual social media outreach, and more than a third do not have bilingual staff or call-in language lines.⁷ These constraints highlight the need for stronger federal support and coordination to ensure all communities receive timely, accurate emergency information in a language that they understand.

The stakes of inadequate communication go beyond immediate safety—they also affect a community’s ability to recover economically after a disaster. Immigrants in Florida’s workforce—including many who are classified as LEP—contribute an estimated \$179 billion to the state economy annually in personal income, making up more than one-fifth of all spending power in the state.⁸ Throughout the United States, immigrants represent approximately 17 percent of the nation’s labor force and contribute over \$2 trillion annually to the United States’ gross domestic product. Ensuring effective communication with these LEP communities during emergencies not only protects lives but also safeguards economic resilience by minimizing disruption and enabling faster recovery.

As the FCC convenes its Hurricane Season Resiliency Roundtable, it has an opportunity to address longstanding gaps in language accessibility during disasters. To improve access to lifesaving information and support economic resilience, the FCC should

[the-wake-hurricanes-helene-and-milton/#:~:text=Evacuation%20efforts%20for%20storms%20have,a%20large%20number%20of%20residents.](#)

⁴ Federal Emergency Management Agency. *National Risk Index Map*. FEMA, <https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/map>.

⁵ Pew Research Center. “Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants.” Pew Research Center, 27 Sept. 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/27/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/>; WUFT News. “Florida Lacks Language Guidance for Disaster Communications, Leaving Counties, Residents on Their Own.” WUFT, 24 Sept. 2024, <https://www.wuft.org/2024-09-24/florida-lacks-language-guidance-for-disaster-communications-leaving-counties-residents-on-their-own>.

⁶ CF Public. “Some Don’t Evacuate Despite Repeated Hurricane Warnings Because They Can’t.” *CF Public*, 25 Sept. 2024, <https://www.cfpublic.org/2024-09-25/some-dont-evacuate-despite-repeated-hurricane-warnings-because-they-cant>.

⁷ WUFT News. “Florida Lacks Language Guidance for Disaster Communications, Leaving Counties, Residents on Their Own.” *WUFT*, 24 Sept. 2024, <https://www.wuft.org/2024-09-24/florida-lacks-language-guidance-for-disaster-communications-leaving-counties-residents-on-their-own>.

⁸ FWD.us. “Immigrants Are Crucial to Florida’s Economy.” *FWD.us*, 2024, <https://www.fwd.us/news/immigrants-are-crucial-to-floridas-economy/>.

prioritize making public safety communications—including Wireless Emergency Alerts, Emergency Alert System messages broadcast over television and radio, and 9-1-1 accessibility standards—multilingual, culturally competent, and accessible to all. Language access must be embedded into every phase of disaster management: preparedness, response, and recovery. Yet too often, it is treated as an afterthought.

For these reasons, we urge the FCC to include LEP-serving advocates, language access experts, and representatives of immigrant, refugee, and Indigenous communities in the July 7th roundtable. Their perspectives are critical to identifying systemic weaknesses, enhancing protocols, and ensuring emergency systems reach all communities before, during, and after disasters.

Thank you for your attention to this critical component of disaster preparedness and public safety.

Sincerely,



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



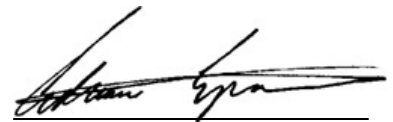
Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



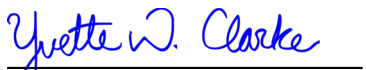
Maxwell Alejandro Frost
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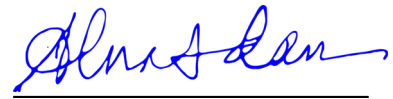
Darren Soto
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Adriano Espaillat
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Yvette D. Clarke
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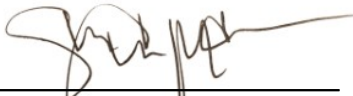
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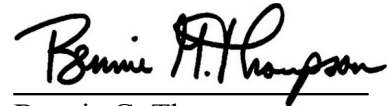
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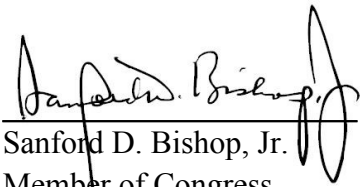
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McCormick
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Bennie G. Thompson
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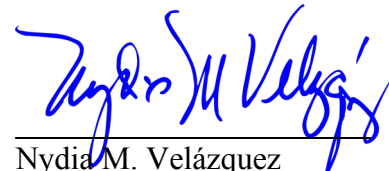
Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
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Lois Frankel
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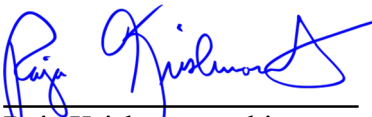
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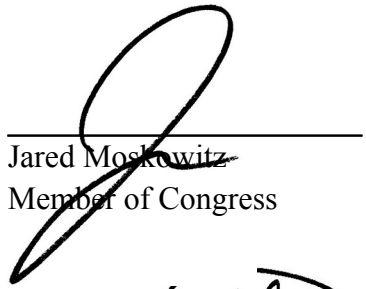
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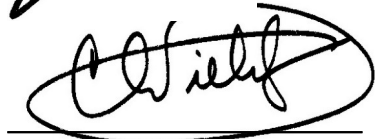
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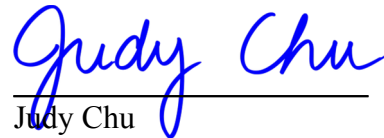
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