

NAHMA LEGISLATIVE ACTION: LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

PLEASE COSPONSOR S. 2018 AND SUPPORT THE IDENTICAL LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LANGUAGE INCLUDED IN THE SECTION 8 VOUCHER REFORM ACT (SEVRA) OF 2008, which allows the Department of Housing and Urban Development to better serve persons with limited English proficiency by providing technical assistance to recipients of Federal funds.

Background

Congress has taken important actions to improve the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) guidance, which became effective March 7, 2007. The guidance obligates recipients of HUD funding, including affordable rental housing providers, to provide translated documents and oral interpretation services to persons with limited English proficiency. However, HUD has not provided additional funding for affordable housing providers to offset the costs of providing language services or identified a specific list of documents housing providers are expected to translate. Senator Robert Menendez originally introduced the LEP compromise legislation passed by the House of Representatives as part of the Section 8 reform bill (H.R. 1851) as free-standing legislation in the Senate, S.2018. Senate Banking Committee Chairman Christopher Dodd has included the important compromise language of S. 2018 within the Senate version of the Section 8 Voucher Reform Act of 2008. With start-up funding for LEP HUD translations in place, the new language will allow HUD to better serve persons with limited proficiency in the English language by providing technical assistance to recipients of Federal funds.

NAHMA strongly supports S. 2018, and we urge all Senators to cosponsor this bill, as well as the SEVRA of 2008.

- The FY 2008 Consolidated Appropriations Bill (P.L. 110-161) provides \$380,000 to fund HUD's translations for those with limited English proficiency.
- S. 2018 has provided an excellent framework to guide HUD in the use of LEP appropriations and the implementation of HUD's LEP guidance.
- This carefully crafted legislation addresses the concerns of affordable housing providers and civil rights advocates.
- Of particular interest to affordable housing providers are provisions in the bill which:
 - Create a task force of industry and civil rights stakeholders to identify vital documents (to include both official HUD forms and unofficial property documents);
 - Require HUD to translate the vital documents within six months; and
 - Create a HUD-administered 1-800 hotline to assist with oral interpretation needs.
- Language identical to S. 2018 was included in both the SEVRA of 2007 (H.R. 1851), which the House passed by an overwhelming vote of 333 to 83, and the Senate's version of SEVRA.
- This important legislation addresses the cost and vagueness concerns raised by housing providers, and it will provide greater assistance to persons with limited English proficiency in need of affordable housing.