



**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Filipino is the Newest Language Requirement for the City of San Francisco**

San Francisco, CA -- After months of dialogue with city officials, Filipino community members and advocates will celebrate San Francisco's certification of Filipino as the 3<sup>rd</sup> language required for city communications. Today, San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee will be joined by Board Supervisors, the Filipino Community Center (FCC), Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and Filipino community leaders and supporters to announce this historic achievement.

In 2009, the city of San Francisco passed a new Language Access Ordinance (LAO), which requires improved language access for city residents, with certain requirements for populations which exceed a threshold of 10,000 limited English proficient or "LEP" community members. Using the latest Federal American Community Survey data for the years 2009-2013, the city's planning department was able to verify that Tagalog speakers with limited English proficiency surpassed this threshold.

Rachel Eborá, a Filipino immigrant, native Pilipino (Tagalog) speaker, and Executive Director of Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center attests, "Ikinagagalak namin ang pagpapatunay na ang Pilipino ay magiging ikatlong wikang kailangang isalin ng lungsod ng San Francisco para sa mga komunikasyon nito. Sa mga higit na sampung libong Pilipinong nagsasalita ng wikang pambansang ito'y nawa'y madadagdagan ang kanilang pagkamit ng mga serbisyo at iba pang mga pangangailangan sa pamumuhay dito sa San Francisco."

("We are delighted at the certification of Pilipino as the third language that the City of San Francisco is required to translate for its communications. To the over 10,000 Filipinos who speak this national language, our hope is that this certification will provide additional access to services and other resources to live in San Francisco.")

Community advocates stressed the urgent need for San Francisco to certify Filipino (the official language of the Philippines based primarily on Tagalog) as soon as possible because for decades thousands of Filipino residents were not getting basic services due to language barriers. These incidents include Filipinos facing health and safety emergencies and also those feeling excluded from the civic life in a vibrant city like San Francisco because of language capacity.

Edgardo Pichay, Worker Rights Outreach and Education staff at the FCC, translates on an almost daily basis for workers claiming their rights to SF's unique labor laws such as the highest minimum wage in the country. This work includes the two-way translation needed for the wage enforcement officials every week. Pichay states, "In their own language, Filipino immigrants can more easily voice out their concerns, assert their rights and also contribute more effectively to their communities and the city of San Francisco."

On a daily basis, Filipinos who are staff at nonprofits, government employees, nurses and other health care professionals, and family members, including school-age children, all who speak some of the different Philippine languages, are translating for thousands of LEP Filipino residents without

recognition of this additional service they are providing. Advocates and supporters recognized that the city can do much better, especially for concentrated LEP populations in San Francisco like the Filipino community.

The LAO is an important San Francisco policy that requires the city's Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA) to identify "emerging" language populations and to ensure that residents are able to access translation services when needed in a timely manner. Otherwise, a type of language-based discrimination would continue to exist such as past examples where hospital patients were being skipped over by English-speaking patients because they had to wait an hour or more for a translator to arrive at SF General Hospital. Improvements in translation services have been made at the city's hospitals because of state laws like the LAO governing access to medical care for LEP patients.

Filipino will become the 1<sup>st</sup> language certified in San Francisco after the 2009 passage of the LAO, joining the current requirements for Spanish and Chinese (certified in 2000 before the LAO existed). It is a long-overdue recognition of the near century-long presence and continuing contributions of Filipinos in San Francisco, from the days of the Filipino farmworkers at the International Hotel until today.

Terrence Valen, FCC's Organizational Director and President of the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns (NAFCON) concludes, "For our Filipino community members and their families, the whole world opens up to them when they are able to communicate in their mother language. To keep San Francisco a welcoming city for immigrants, officially removing this language barrier is definitely is an important step in the right direction."

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