

Department of Finance

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Director



County of Sacramento

Divisions

Auditor-Controller
Consolidated Utilities Billing & Service
Investments
Revenue Recovery
Tax Collection & Licensing
Treasury

May 6, 2026

Commission on State Mandates
Attn: Juliana F. Gmur, Executive Director
980 Ninth Street, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA 95814



Re: County of Sacramento Comments pertaining to Sonoma County Test Claim, Emergency Communications in Non-English Language (25-TC-03)

Dear Director Gmur and Commission Members:

Sacramento County respectfully submits this comment letter regarding the County of Sonoma’s (“Sonoma”) Test Claim Test Claim 25-TC-03 on Emergency Communications in Non-English Languages.

We concur with Sonoma’s test claim that AB1638 (2023) represents a State reimbursement mandate. In the County of Sacramento, emergency translation needs created by this new mandate are funded by the County of Sacramento’s general fund as no other funding sources exist and the County was not required to undertake this higher level of service prior to this new legislation.

However, we feel it is important to provide context to the requirements of AB1638 and the necessary activities to implement the mandate with the hope that these activities are incorporated in a reimbursable state mandate.

Reimbursable Activities

Language Study

AB 1638 requires local agencies in Government Code Section 7299.7 (b)(1) and (b)(2) to use the American Community Survey or data from an equally reliable source to determine those languages spoken jointly by 5% or more of the population that speak English less than “very well” within each local agency that provides Emergency Response Services.

Further, AB1638 requires that each local jurisdiction perform this analysis again each five-year period to determine applicable languages. In the County of Sacramento, our Emergency Services department performed this analysis internally utilizing County staff and support from legal counsel to determine which languages were qualifying languages under this new mandate. At this

time, only Spanish was determined to be a qualifying language, however, over time, the County may be subject to additional languages. The next closest language is Russian as the County has a growing Russian speaking population, but that language did not yet meet the 5% threshold as of the latest ACS survey.

The time for staff, consultants, and related overhead involved in analyzing the ACS data and determining or re-determining applicable languages should be deemed a reimbursable mandate under AB1638. This requirement clearly is not optional as this section uses the term “shall” throughout (excerpt of Government code 7299.7 below, emphasis added):

*(b)(1) By January 1, 2025, each local agency **shall** use data from the American Community Survey or data from an equally reliable source to determine which languages meet the requirements of subdivision (a) in the local agency’s jurisdiction.*

*(2) Each local agency **shall** reassess the data every five years to ensure that the language or languages in which the local agency provides information are consistent with the requirements of subdivision (a).*

Translation of Information

Beyond the ACS study (discussed above), Government Code 7299.7 is prescriptive in the nature of the type of translation that is required. Critically again, AB1638 uses the term agency “shall” throughout demonstrating the higher level of service that is required and that the requirements are not optional. This is clear in Sections 7299.7(c)(1), (c)(2), and (c)(3) shown below:

*(c) A local agency providing information pursuant to this section **shall** do both of the following:*

(1) Ensure that the quality of information translated and provided to individuals that speak English less than “very well” is as comprehensive, actionable, and timely as the information provided to English-speaking persons.

(2) Endeavor to utilize community members with the cultural competencies and language skills necessary to effectively communicate with those that speak English less than “very well” using, whenever feasible, native speakers of the relevant languages who also speak English fluently.

Translation Parity

Under AB1638, the nature of the translation that must be performed is that the information must be as comprehensive, actionable and as timely as the information provided to English speaking persons (for applicable languages according to each agencies ACS study). Herein is where the cost lies.

Presently, the County of Sacramento has pre-scripted messaging to ensure timely communication for a variety of disaster scenarios. However, this bill AB1638 now requires this messaging must be duplicated in other languages. The County must ensure pre-scripted disaster and emergency messaging is translated in advance of the disaster to ensure a comprehensive and timely response and to meet the parity requirement contained in AB1638.

However, each emergency or disaster will represent differing circumstances and as a result, the County must identify volunteers, employees or contractors that can also prepare and release supplemental messaging as needed during the course of an emergency. To accomplish this, these individuals (whether volunteer, employee, or contractor) need to work with the Emergency Operations Center and individuals that would perform translation duties would work alongside their peers to ensure consistency of messaging and timing of the release.

Thus, the County should be able to claim training costs needed for additional individuals (to perform added language translation under AB1638) to be trained on emergency communications prior to an incident to ensure they are ready and prepared to work on messaging in an emergency operations center. The County has determined that individuals performing language translation need to be trained and sworn in as Disaster Service workers to be covered for their actions performed during an emergency in accordance with Government Code 8657(a). Due to the language translation needs, this requires additional individuals to be trained to work during emergencies.

This is also supported by the fact that the mandate encourages use of community members with cultural competencies which further supports the need for training additional individuals.

Volunteer Management/Cultural Competency

AB1638 requires that the local agency shall endeavor to utilize community members with cultural competencies and language skills to effectively communicate during emergencies. The utilization of community members requires a significant undertaking in identifying individuals or groups who fit the criteria, ensuring that they are enrolled as Disaster Service Workers, maintaining records of requests and deliverables, and maintaining rosters and coordination, even if these individuals are not ultimately used to translate. This would involve time and costs from the county's Volunteer Specialist to recruit volunteers, maintain those contacts and records, and supervise volunteers during an emergency. As discussed above, the only way to protect volunteers from claims regarding errors or omissions in translation is to enroll them as Disaster Service Workers so these individuals are afforded certain protection during proclaimed emergency. This enrollment and record keeping takes time and resources to train and swear in these individuals as Disaster Service Workers.

Ultimately, should the County not have sufficient community members as volunteers, there is a need for a backup plan that includes staff or contractors to ensure emergency communication meets the requirement of "comprehensive, actionable, and timely as the information provided to English-speaking persons".

Thus, the actual staff or contractor time (and applicable overhead), including a program for volunteer recruitment, training and management should be allowed as a reimbursable cost in addition to being allowed to change for any time actually performing translation duties for languages identified to meet AB1638 requirements during the course of an emergency.

On-going or One-Time

Since this is an ongoing mandate, the costs should be determined to be on-going rather than one time. The Language study or review of ACS survey results must be completed each five-year period and is not one time in nature.

The training as mentioned previously will be ongoing as turnover occurs or as emergency needs and communication volumes determines the number of volunteers, staff, or contractors needed to fulfill the mandate. This will vary based on the size of the jurisdiction and what emergency situations are expected to occur.

Finally, emergencies and disasters represent a constant threat in California that needs to be actively planned for and managed appropriately. As a result, costs for staff and consultants to perform translation will be an ongoing need to meet the mandate.

Conclusion:

In summary, we request the Commission on State Mandates determine AB1638 is a state reimbursable mandate and hope that the reimbursable activities are inclusive of our comments above which supplements the County of Sonoma's claim of the higher level of service required by AB1638.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this response. Should you have any questions or require further clarification, please contact me at 916-874-7450 or rindec@saccounty.gov and we would be pleased to provide additional information.

I hereby certify by my signature below that the statements made in this document are true and correct of my own knowledge, or, as to all other matters, I believe them to be true and correct based upon information and belief.

Executed on May 6, 2026, at Sacramento, California, by:



Chad Rinde
Director of Finance
Sacramento County Department of Finance

DECLARATION OF SERVICE BY EMAIL

I, the undersigned, declare as follows:

I am a resident of the County of Sacramento and I am over the age of 18 years, and not a party to the within action. My place of employment is 980 Ninth Street, Suite 300, Sacramento, California 95814.

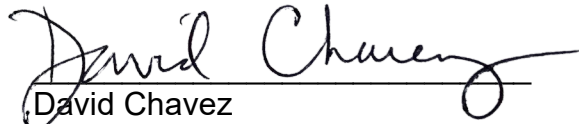
On May 6, 2026, I served the:

- **Current Mailing List dated April 27, 2026**
- **County of Sacramento's Comments pertaining to Sonoma County Test Claim, Emergency Communications in Non-English Language (25-TC-03) filed May 6, 2026**

Emergency Communications in Non-English Languages, 25-TC-03
Government Code § 7299.7; Statutes of 2023, Chapter 587 (AB 1638); effective January 1, 2024 and operative January 1, 2025
County of Sonoma, Claimant

by making it available on the Commission's website and providing notice of how to locate it to the email addresses provided on the attached mailing list.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct, and that this declaration was executed on May 6, 2026 at Sacramento, California.



David Chavez
Commission on State Mandates
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COMMISSION ON STATE MANDATES

Mailing List

Last Updated: 4/27/26

Claim Number: 25-TC-03

Matter: Emergency Communications in Non-English Languages

Claimant: County of Sonoma

TO ALL PARTIES, INTERESTED PARTIES, AND INTERESTED PERSONS:

Each commission mailing list is continuously updated as requests are received to include or remove any party or person on the mailing list. A current mailing list is provided with commission correspondence, and a copy of the current mailing list is available upon request at any time. Except as provided otherwise by commission rule, when a party or interested party files any written material with the commission concerning a claim, it shall simultaneously serve a copy of the written material on the parties and interested parties to the claim identified on the mailing list provided by the commission. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 2, § 1181.3.)

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