

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
SUMBUL SIDDIQUI

mayor@cambridgema.gov  
Phone: 617-349-4321



OFFICE OF THE VICE MAYOR  
ALANNA M. MALLON

amallon@cambridgema.gov  
Phone: 617-349-4280

## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge, MA

**To:** Cambridge City Council  
**From:** Alanna Mallon, Vice Mayor and Sumbul Siddiqui, Mayor  
**Date:** February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
**Subject:** Family Policy Council – Language Access

---

To the Honorable, the City Council,

As the Chair and appointed City Council member of the Family Policy Council (FPC), we wanted to update you on some exciting work that is being undertaken around language access in Cambridge, which we know is one of the greatest barriers facing many of our families whose first language is not English. The Family Policy Council, officially known as the Coordinating Council for Children, Youth and Families, is dedicated to developing policy and program recommendations aimed at ensuring all children, teens, and their families have access to the resources they need to be successful, engaged residents who are prepared for life in our community and in the world.

As you know, the richness of our vibrant community is due to the many residents who immigrated here and chose Cambridge as their home, and whose primary language is not English. For many of our residents, the lack of language access can act as a significant barrier to civic participation and can be actively harmful to residents who may not know their rights, or other critically important information that the City should be providing in multiple languages. Since the Fall of 2020, the Family Policy Council, under the direction of FPC Executive Director Nancy Tauber, has been investigating ways to develop City-wide supports and systems to ensure language justice and provide language access resources to families and providers; and if appropriate, the Council will develop recommendations for implementation.

The Family Policy Council has defined language justice as “the right everyone has to communicate, to understand and to be understood in the language(s) in which they feel most comfortable.”

The Family Policy Council has convened a working group of members to lead the discovery process of their 2020-2021 work plan. The working group has been gathering information, identifying needs, gaps, and best practices, which will be used to shape the action and recommendations of the council. The working group consists of the following members of the FPC and City Staff:

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
SUMBUL SIDDIQUI

mayor@cambridgema.gov  
Phone: 617-349-4321



OFFICE OF THE VICE MAYOR  
ALANNA M. MALLON

amallon@cambridgema.gov  
Phone: 617-349-4280

## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge, MA

Working Group Members	
Tina Alu (Co-Chair)	CEOC
Robin Harris (Co-Chair)	Cambridge Public Schools
Nancy Tauber (Co-Chair)	Family Policy Council
Thurya Beek	DHSP's Community Engagement Team
Rabeya Akther	DHSP's Community Engagement Team
Lauren Morse	CPS Family Liaison
Aboma Dirbaba	CPS Family Liaison
Kunjal Shah	CPS Family Liaison
Shayla Simmons	Cambridge Housing Authority
Melissa Peters	Cambridge Community Development Department
Kate Thurman	Commission for Persons with Disabilities
Bridget Martin	Department of Human Services & City Manager's Communications Team
Christine Elow	Cambridge Police Department
Ester Serra Luque	Transition House
CYC	Cambridge Youth Council
Najah Casimir	Traffic, Parking and Traffic Department
David Corbie	CDD's Community Engagement Team
Jose Wendel	Public Health Department, Cambridge Health Alliance
Crystal Rosa	Human Rights, Immigrant Rights & Citizenship, Peace Commission, and Police Review & Advisory Board

The working group has met three times and is in the "Discovery Phase," which includes identifying questions for residents, families, City, school, and community partners, determining how to collect information (surveys, interviews, focus groups), learning from others, and understanding demographics to develop recommendations for the Planning Phase. In addition, they have joined the Municipal Language Access Network, which is a great resource for networking, as well as sharing information, solutions to common problems, and best practice standards. Through this connection, they have interviewed Language

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
SUMBUL SIDDIQUI

mayor@cambridgema.gov  
Phone: 617-349-4321



OFFICE OF THE VICE MAYOR  
ALANNA M. MALLON

amallon@cambridgema.gov  
Phone: 617-349-4280

## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge, MA

Access Coordinators from Boston, Massachusetts, Charlotte, North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina, Richmond, Virginia, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Seattle, Washington.

We had two presentations at this month's Family Policy Council meeting; the first was from Jodie Stanley, Human Rights Department Outreach and Education Coordinator, City of Greensboro, North Carolina and the second was from Cliff Cook, Senior Planner Information Manager, City of Cambridge.

Cliff Cook's presentation focused around current language access and gaps in Cambridge, and is part of the "understanding demographics" charge from the working group. The presentation focused on the demographics of the 36,917 Cambridge residents who speak a language other than English at home. Additionally, there was demographic information on how many of our residents live in a "Linguistically Isolated Household," which is defined as one where no one 14 years or older speaks English very well. There was also a detailed presentation with a demographic breakdown of residents with a hearing or vision difficulty, by gender, age, race, geography, education, income, employment, and internet access. Having this deep demographic data will help guide the work of the working group as they narrow their focus on identifying urgent language access needs. The full presentation can be found [here](#).

The presentation by Jodie Stanley in Greensboro, NC is part of the "learning from others" charge from the working group. Greensboro, NC developed a language access plan in response to an audit by the Justice Department because they were not in compliance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. They submitted their [plan](#) to the Department of Justice in 2010, and have employed a phased roll-out strategy to address any concerns about budgetary impact. Jodie manages language access for the City, and they have identified a liaison from each department who works with Jodie to coordinate and support language access efforts, and training for multilingual and monolingual employees. Some of their meaningful accomplishments have been as simple as using more infographics, improving customer service, and providing more signage and language identification cards. To address equity issues, they have implemented a Bilingual Pay Incentive program. Greensboro's goal is to go from compliance to caring, and Jodie provided us with valuable lessons from what they have learned.

These informative presentations and learning sessions, as well as the working group discovery process, will help guide our work on the Family Policy Council to develop goals and policies around language access in Cambridge. We will continue to update the City Council on our progress as we move closer to May and potential policy proposals. Please do not hesitate to reach out anytime with questions or concerns about this critical work that is being undertaken by the Family Policy Council and the working group.

Thank you,

Alanna Mallon  
Cambridge Vice Mayor

Sumbul Siddiqui  
Cambridge Mayor