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Testimony
of Brendan Cheney, Budget and Policy Analyst
Before the City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings
on the Equal Access to Housing Services Act

March 27, 2008

Good afternoon Chairman Dilan and members of the Housing and Buildings Committee. I am Brendan Cheney, budget and policy analyst covering housing and homelessness issues for the New York City Independent Budget Office. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Equal Access to Housing Services Act.

In April, 2007, the Independent Budget Office completed a cost estimate on an earlier version of the Equal Access to Housing Services Act. Based on our analysis, we projected the new law would cost the city \$7.0 million on an annual basis, with additional one-time costs of \$375,000 in the first year. The original letter with our cost estimate is attached. I will summarize our cost estimate in this testimony and then answer any questions you may have.

Intro 596 would require the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to provide language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency, including translating documents and completed forms, providing bilingual housing inspectors, and publishing information in multiple languages.

The intro requires that HPD provide language assistance in the top nine most commonly spoken languages in each borough (referred to in the bill as “covered languages”). Based on census information provided by the City University of New York, IBO estimates the total number of covered languages to be 17.

Estimated Costs for Intro 596			
<i>Dollars in thousands</i>			
	Full-Time Positions	Annual Costs	One-Time Costs
Section 8 - 1103	29	\$ 1,752	-
Section 8 - 1104, 1105	-	-	\$ 375
Section 8 - 1106	88	\$ 5,256	-
Section 8 - 1107	-	-	-
Section 8 - 1108	-	-	-
Totals	117	\$ 7,008	\$ 375
SOURCES: IBO, DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT			

In our original estimate, IBO assumed that HPD would implement the bill by adding full-time bilingual housing inspectors in the covered languages in each borough to provide bilingual oral communication

during code enforcement services (**section 8 – 1106**). IBO assumed that HPD would need one housing inspector for each of the nine top languages in each borough available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in order to be able to respond to emergency “class C” violations. Assuming four shifts per week, and subtracting current bilingual housing inspectors that could fill this need, IBO determined the new net need to be 79 new bilingual inspectors and nine support staff at a cost of \$5.3 million per year, including benefits.

Section 8 – 1103 requires HPD to offer language assistance when individuals seek benefits or information from the department, to provide translation services at meetings, trainings or events, and to allow individuals to fill out forms in their primary language. IBO estimates that HPD could meet this requirement with the addition of 24 full-time translators and five support staff at an annual cost of \$1.8 million. Translation of the Web site content, as required in **section 8-1107**, could be accomplished using these resources.

IBO also considered two alternatives for implementing Section 8 - 1103 using part-time staff and contracts. Both alternatives would cost roughly \$850,000 and are discussed in more detail in the [attached letter](#). These two options are based on the assumption that some languages would have a low volume of translations, and therefore not necessitate full-time translators. To the extent that this is true, HPD could pursue one of these options and reduce costs.

Under **section 8-1104** HPD would be required to translate all documents into the covered languages, and **section 8-1105** requires HPD to post informational notices in the covered languages at HPD locations and requires landlords to post notices in the lobbies of apartment buildings. Some documents and other language content are already translated into Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Creole, and Russian through a three-year contract for \$100,000. IBO projected that translating into all covered languages will cost \$375,000, including \$250,000 to translate the remaining documents and other content, and \$125,000 to develop a poster and pamphlet and mail them to owners and managers of all multiple dwellings in the city.

One last thing to consider is the potential for an overall increase in demand for housing services at HPD. The intent of the legislation is to increase overall awareness of, and access to, housing services. To the extent that this is successful, demand and therefore costs for HPD services could increase, particularly in code enforcement and program applications. We are, however, unable to estimate the magnitude of any such increase.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.