



NEWS RELEASE
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Class Action Lawsuit Filed Against New York City Transit Authority for Discriminatory Treatment to Immigrants with Disabilities

New York City Transit Violates Federal and Local Law by Failing to Provide Language Services to Limited English Proficient New Yorkers

New York, NY – December 17, 2014 – New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (“NYLPI”), a leading civil rights advocacy group for marginalized New Yorkers, filed a class action lawsuit in federal court today against the New York City Transit Authority (“New York City Transit”) on behalf of five individuals who were subjected to discriminatory treatment when applying for or trying to use Access-A-Ride, the city’s accessible transportation service for people with disabilities. Access-A-Ride’s widespread failure to provide adequate translation and interpretation services to limited English proficient (“LEP”) applicants violates federal and local law, including the Americans with Disabilities Act and the New York City Human Rights Law. The lawsuit demands that New York City Transit create a comprehensive system to provide language services to LEP individuals.

Access-A-Ride is a critical service for the estimated tens of thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities who do not speak English well. New York City Transit’s unfair and illegal treatment prevents people who cannot use the public transportation system due to their disabilities from attending critical medical appointments, going to church, buying groceries or visiting relatives.

“I need Access-A-Ride services because my sons have autism and need a safe way to travel to medical appointments. But without a Chinese interpreter, I cannot call to arrange rides for them,” said Nyuk Siem Yap, one of the five plaintiffs in the suit, through an interpreter. “There are many people in my community who feel isolated because they don’t speak English well but need Access-A-Ride services for their children.”

“Access-a-Ride is one of the most important resources for New York’s disabled community and seniors. As a city of immigrants, we must do everything we can to ensure that Access-A-Ride is easily accessible for New Yorkers with limited English proficiency,” said New York City Public Advocate, Letitia James. “NYLPI’s lawsuit is an important step in improving Access-A-Ride access for all New Yorkers.”

“Federal law requires that New Yorkers with disabilities have equal access to public transportation. Yet New York City Transit explicitly *excludes* people who need Access-A-Ride services, merely because they do not speak English well,” said Aditi Shah, Staff Attorney with NYLPI’s Disability Justice Program. “New York City Transit’s policy is not only unfair, it’s illegal.”

“New York City Transit is woefully behind the times when it comes to serving immigrants. It’s shameful that in a city known for its diversity, Access-A-Ride is unwilling to provide equal access to New Yorkers who need its services but cannot communicate in English,” said Jenny Veloz, Advocate in the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. “It’s disheartening to think that individuals who are eligible for Access-A-Ride are not able to get the service simply because they cannot read the application or find someone to interpret for

them at the application center.”

The Access-A-Ride application process is complex, including an in-person interview, a test of the applicant’s physical and mental capabilities, and a lengthy written application. Yet, New York City Transit fails to provide interpreters or translated documents. In fact, individuals are routinely turned away from the application center when they appear without their own interpreter. Even if an LEP applicant manages to qualify for the service, many cannot use the service as much as needed because they have difficulty communicating with Access-A-Ride staff to schedule rides or communicate if vans are late or fail to pick them up.

To read the filed lawsuit, visit [NYLPI's Translating Access](#) page on NYLPI’s website.

About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) advances equality and civil rights, with a focus on health justice, disability rights and environmental justice, through the power of community lawyering and partnerships with the private bar. Through community lawyering, NYLPI puts its legal, policy and community organizing expertise at the service of New York City communities and individuals. NYLPI’s partnership with the private bar strengthens its advocacy and connects community groups and nonprofits with critical legal assistance. NYLPI is the recipient of The New York Community Trust Nonprofit Excellence Awards.

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