Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 3, 2025

The Honorable Ken Graham
Director
National Weather Service
1325 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Director Graham:

We write to express our serious concern regarding the National Weather Service's (NWS) recent decision to discontinue the translation of weather alerts and forecasts into languages other than English. This change, purportedly prompted by the lapse of a contract with a third-party provider, created a dangerous gap in access to information for the many Americans who rely on multilingual alerts and forecasts to stay safe during critical emergencies and make everyday decisions that impact their families, livelihoods, and our nation's economy.

We are relieved that multilingual translation services have now been restored. However, the disruption highlighted the vulnerabilities in the current system and the unacceptable risk created by lapses in language access. For tens of millions of Americans, receiving weather alerts in a language they understand can mean the difference between life and death. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 68 million people in the United States speak a language other than English at home.[1] That number has nearly tripled since 1980 and now represents one in five Americans.[2] For these individuals and families, multilingual alerts are critical for preparing for severe weather events, which increase in frequency and intensity every year. The absence of accessible warnings can—and likely will—lead to avoidable tragedy.

The real-world consequences of inaccessible alerts are not hypothetical. Take, for example, the 2021 deadly tornado outbreak that hit Mayfield, Kentucky, a city with a large Spanish-speaking population. According to news coverage of the outbreak, a Spanish-speaking family in the impacted area had initially ignored a tornado alert delivered only in English because they could not read the warning.[3] It was not until the family received a Spanish-language alert that they quickly took shelter on the first floor of their home—shortly before the second floor of their home was wiped out. If they had not received the alert in Spanish, the outcome could have been fatal.[4] Communities across the United States — including speakers of Vietnamese, Chinese, Tagalog, Korean, French, Haitian Creole, and many African languages — also face significant barriers during emergencies when alerts are not available in their primary language. No one should be left without life-saving information simply because of the language they speak.

---

[1] https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/languages-we-speak-in-united-states.html
[2] https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/languages-we-speak-in-united-states.html#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20in,recent%20U.S.%20Census%20Bureau%20report.
[3] https://apnews.com/article/weather-spanish-translation-noaa-nws-trump-71c727dbe2e4956247c9d9152494f1dc
[4] https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2025/04/08/nws-translation-service-alerts/

Beyond the immediate risk to public safety, this abrupt lapse in translation services also risked creating operational challenges for those on the front lines of weather communication. During the lapse, local meteorologists and alert originators—who rely on NWS-provided multilingual content—were forced to fill the gap themselves. Unfortunately, on-site translation is something not many have the staff or resources to do quickly and accurately. Many communities that rely on NWS-provided multilingual content are unlikely to continue sending multilingual weather alerts should NWS's centralized translation support halt or lapse again.

Multilingual access to weather forecasts is not only critical during emergencies—it is equally vital for day-to-day planning and economic stability. Families rely on accurate, understandable forecasts to decide whether it's safe to send their children to school or for parents to travel to work. Businesses across key sectors—including agriculture, construction, transportation, energy, and tourism—depend on timely weather information to operate safely and efficiently. When forecasts are delivered in clear, accessible language, they empower individuals and industries alike to make informed decisions, reduce risk, and maintain productivity. Stripping away multilingual access undermines this everyday functionality and places non-English-speaking communities and families at a great disadvantage.

Ensuring that all Americans—regardless of the language they speak—have access to life-saving weather information is not optional; it is a core responsibility of the NWS. In a nation as diverse as ours, language access must be treated as an essential component of emergency preparedness and public communication—not an expendable service.

In light of the recent disruption and the restoration of multilingual services, we respectfully request responses to the following questions no later than August 1, 2025, to better understand how NWS plans to ensure long-term, uninterrupted language access for all communities:

1. What is the scope of the new contract for multilingual translation services? Does it include options for renewal or extension to ensure service continuity beyond the initial term?

2. What safeguards has NWS put in place to prevent future gaps in translation services, particularly during contract transitions or vendor changes?

3. Has NWS conducted a risk assessment or after-action review to identify what led to the previous lapse and how similar disruptions can be avoided in the future? If so, what were the findings and resulting action steps?

4. Is there a contingency plan or backup system in place to provide uninterrupted translation services in the event of a contract lapse, provider failure, or other unexpected disruption?

5. How does NWS evaluate and monitor the performance and reliability of its language service providers? Are there benchmarks or quality assurance measures to ensure timely and accurate translations in all covered languages?

6. What criteria does NWS use to determine which languages are included in its multilingual alerts? How frequently is this list updated to reflect demographic shifts and community needs?

7. How is NWS engaging with non-English-speaking communities and local emergency managers to ensure that multilingual weather communication is effective, culturally appropriate, and broadly accessible?

We strongly urge NWS to institutionalize safeguards to prevent future interruptions to multilingual services and to treat language access as a permanent, non-negotiable aspect of public safety.

We stand ready to support your efforts to secure the necessary resources to sustain and strengthen language access in weather communications. The safety, preparedness, and economic resilience of our communities depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

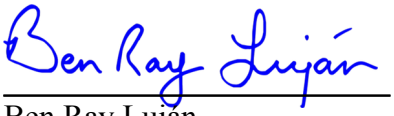
Adriano Espaillat
Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

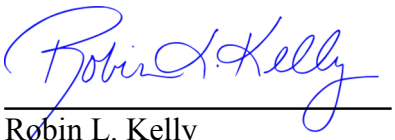
Grace Meng
CAPAC Chair

Steven Horsford
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



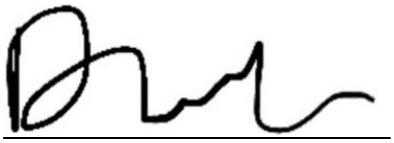
Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

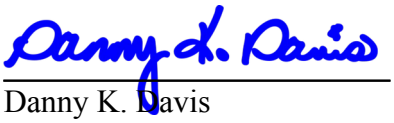
Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress

Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



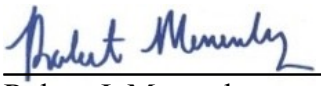
Dan Goldman
Member of Congress

Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress

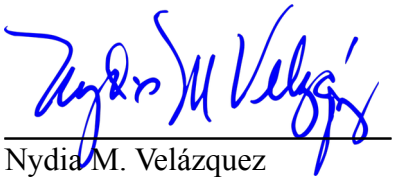


Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



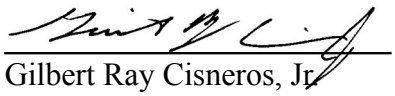
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress

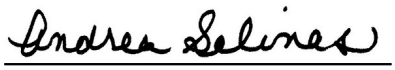
Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

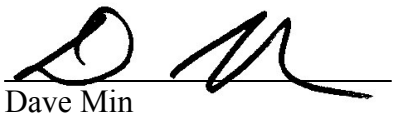
Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress



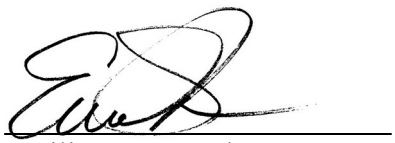
Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress



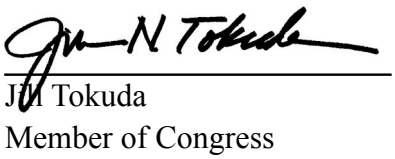
Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Dave Min
Member of Congress

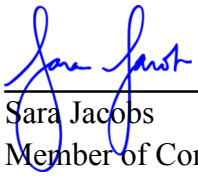


Emilia Strong Sykes
Member of Congress



Jill Tokuda
Member of Congress

Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress