

Introduction

People are held in jail for short sentences, while awaiting a bail hearing or trial, or before re-entering the community after serving a prison term. For an inmate in any of these situations, clear communication with family and friends can be crucial. Those on the outside can assist with bail money, witnesses, lawyers, medical information, and they can ensure the inmate has somewhere to go upon release. However, language barriers can break this important line of communication which also facilitates the jailer's work. It all starts with the simple ability to learn whether a loved-one is in jail.

Major Findings

To understand how California's sheriff departments, address the nation's most linguistically diverse population, this study examines language access for inmate locator services, an important, and yet very simple, source of public information on jail inmates and arrested persons.

- Across the state only the San Francisco Sheriff's Department provides inmate locator services in languages other than English.
- More than a million households in California do not have meaningful access to inmate locator services because of language barriers.
- Los Angeles County has significantly more Spanish-speaking households with limited-English proficiency and a larger Latino jail population than any other county, but no translation service for its inmate locator website.

Language Access as a Civil Right

The most relevant measure of the need for language access for inmate locator services is the Census Bureau category of "[Limited English-Speaking Households](#)"—those where no one over the age of 14 speaks English at least "very well." In practical terms that means that no adult in the household could readily get information from an inmate locator service if it was only available in English. Nearly one in ten California households, more than a million in all, meet the definition.

In 1974, the Supreme Court affirmed in *Lau v. Nichols* that the prohibition on discrimination based on national origins that is enshrined in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 includes discrimination on the basis of language. President Clinton sought to implement that standard in the public sector. In 2000 he issued [an executive order](#) that required any government agencies receiving federal funds to ensure every individual "meaningful access" to programs and services in a language they can understand. What constitutes meaningful access has been debated and litigated frequently since then. Nonetheless, the strictest enforcement has come in the criminal justice system, particularly in court rooms or other circumstances where a language barrier can lead to unwarranted incarceration. Both as a matter of law and of the effective administration of justice, sheriff's departments are obliged to provide language access when dealing with a linguistically diverse population. The logical place to start is with inmate locator services. The information exchanged in both the queries and responses is quite simple. It is perhaps the most outward-facing service a jail provides. And, readily available technology, such as online translation applications, can provide meaningful access at no cost.

Language Access and Inmate Locators

Inmate locator services typically involve an online portal where the public can search for a jail inmate or someone under arrest by entering information like name, age, race and sex. If there is a match, the portal can provide information such as an inmate’s location, the date and time of arrest and booking, bail amount, and next court date. Meaningful access to that essential service is denied to persons with limited abilities in English if it is not delivered in a language they can understand.

A survey by USC researchers of sheriff’s departments in California’s 58 counties found that 32 use Inmate Aid to provide inmate locator services. A seven-year old private firm, Inmate Aid contracts a variety of communications and information services with federal, state and local incarceration facilities around the country. Its inmate locator services for those 32 California jails operate only in English with no translation options. Furthermore, those services report only the location of an inmate or arrested person and no additional information.

The remaining 26 California sheriff’s departments operate their own inmate locator services. Typically, they provide more information, including bail amount, booking date, and upcoming court dates. However, only the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department provides language access. Its inmate locator portal includes a Google Translate function.

Impact on California Latinos

In total more than 1.1 million linguistically isolated households in California do not have meaningful access to inmate locator services should a loved one get arrested or jailed. Given that Spanish is the most common language spoken by Californians with limited English proficiency, Latino families are disproportionately affected. Compounding the problem is a jail incarceration rate for California Latinos that is half again higher than it is for the state’s whites, 312 vs 216 per 100,000 adult residents, which is still below far the rate of 900 for African Americans, according to the Vera Institute. The table below offers a measure of the challenge faced by the ten California counties with the largest populations of Limited English-Speaking Households where Spanish is the language of the home. Recall that among them, only San Francisco offers inmate locator services in a language other than English.

	# Linguistically Isolated Spanish speaking Households	Latino Jail Incarceration Rate Per 10,000*	Inmate Locator Language Access
Los Angeles County	243,565	236	No
San Diego County	43,374	238	No
Riverside County	42,035	249	No
Orange County	38,181	465	No
San Bernardino	30,946	356	No
Fresno County	23,870	449	No
Kern County	20,867	324	No
Tulare County	20,008	508	No
Alameda County	17,434	261	No
Santa Clara County	16,940	555	No
California	665,765	312	

*Ages 15-34

Conclusion

Individuals are denied a constitutional right when a sheriff's department does not provide meaningful language access to inmate locator services. Beyond the legal responsibility, meaningful language access is good public policy in jurisdictions with large numbers of residents with limited abilities in English. In California, it is Spanish-speaking Latinos who mostly commonly suffer the consequences of not being able to communicate with jail officials. Given that inmate locator services involve a very simple form of communication, this report's findings suggest there are much broader and graver language barriers between this large community and the sheriff's departments that serve it.

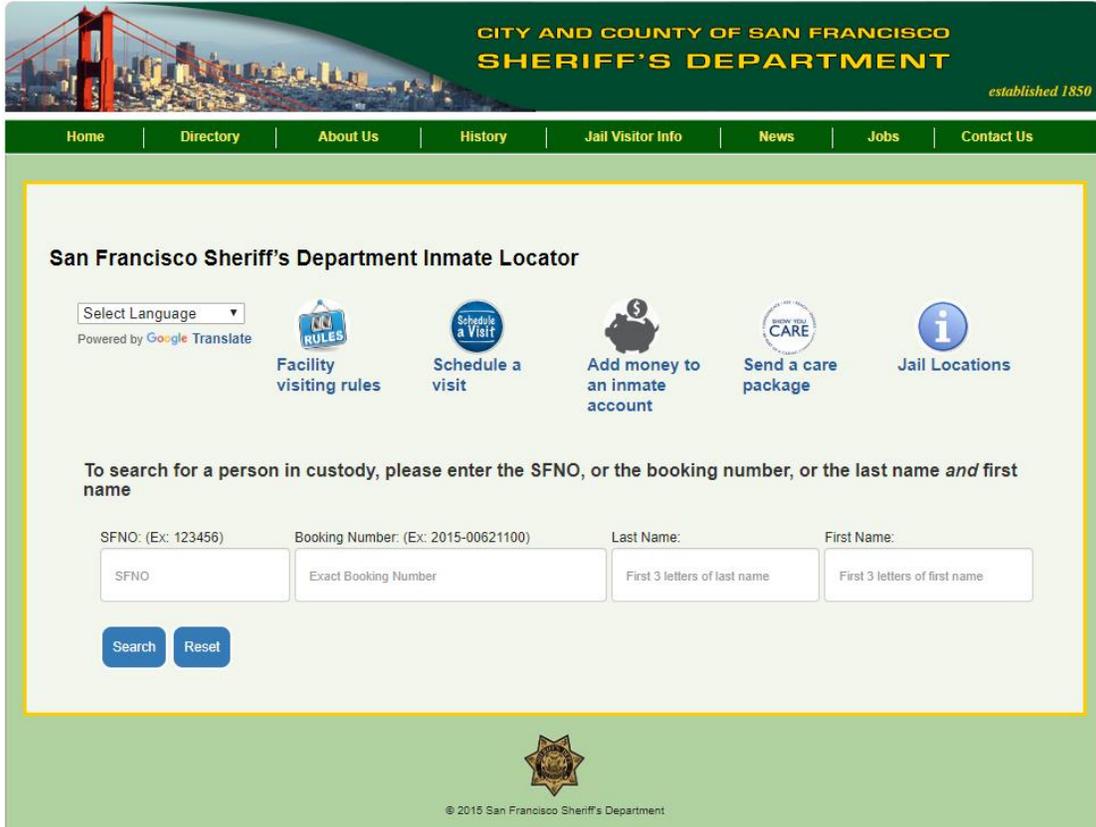
For Further Information:

United States Census Bureau (2017). Limited English Speaking Households as a Percentage of County Total. Retrieved June 30, 2019 from <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2017/comm/english-speaking.html>

Lau v. Nichols, 414 U.S. 563 (1974). Retrieved March 5, 2019 from <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/ll/usrep/usrep414/usrep414563/usrep414563.pdf>

Executive Order 13166, reprinted at 65 Fed. Reg. 50121 (Aug. 16, 2001). Retrieved March 5, 2019 from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2000-08-16/pdf/00-20938.pdf>

Vera Institute Incarceration Trends Portal
<http://trends.vera.org/incarceration-rates?geography=counties&fips=6071&fromProfile=true>



**CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT** established 1850

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San Francisco Sheriff's Department Inmate Locator

Select Language Powered by Google Translate

- Facility visiting rules
- Schedule a visit
- Add money to an inmate account
- Send a care package
- Jail Locations

To search for a person in custody, please enter the SFNO, or the booking number, or the last name *and* first name

SFNO: (Ex: 123456) Booking Number: (Ex: 2015-00621100) Last Name: First Name:

SFNO Exact Booking Number First 3 letters of last name First 3 letters of first name

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Los Angeles *Welcome to Inmate Information Center*

For general custody related questions and help with inmate location, telephone (213) 473-6100.

For Healthcare Concerns which require immediate assistance, please call the medical command center at (213) 893-5544.

Inmate Records will not be available for bookings that occurred within the last 2 hours.

ATTENTION:

Inmate Information will not be available on Sunday 6/30/2019 from approx. 3:00 am - 12:00 pm, due to system maintenance. We apologize for the inconvenience.

Please enter inmate information

Inmate Last Name: (required) Inmate First Name: (required)

Inmate Middle Name: Inmate Date of Birth: (mm/dd/yyyy)



For questions or comments, Please [click here](#) to send an email.
[ADA Policy of Non Discrimination](#)

Deposit money for an inmate's use

For Inmate Regulations to Deposit Money, [Please click here.](#)
Please note, effective Sunday, February 15, 2015, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department will no longer accept online deposits for inmates.