

From Statute to Street: Advancing Civil Rights for Survivors of Violence Through Outreach and Education



Ana Mendoza (she/her), Senior Counsel
Outreach & Education Unit
2026 IAOHRA Conference | August 19, 2026



**Civil Rights
Department**
STATE OF CALIFORNIA



I may not
look like you,
but we all
deserve **fair**
treatment.



Keep California fair
for everyone.

CALCIVILRIGHTS.CA.GOV

Mission

Protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, and from hate violence and human trafficking.

CRD responsibilities

- Investigate complaints of discrimination and other civil rights violations
- Facilitate dispute resolution involving civil rights
- Prosecute violations in civil court
- Issue regulations to provide greater clarity regarding the laws enforced by CRD
- Collect data on the pay and demographics of large employers' workforces
- Conduct outreach and trainings to inform Californians of their rights and obligations under civil rights law
- Work with communities and local and state public bodies to constructively manage and resolve discrimination-based conflict

California Civil Rights Department (CRD) disclaimer and content notes

This workshop is for informational purposes only, does not establish substantive policy or rights, and does not constitute legal advice. You may have existing legal obligations related to these topics – please consult your counsel for tailored guidance.

This presentation mentions topics that can be painful or triggering for some, including violence in the home and community.

Please take care of yourself and feel free to take a break, as needed, to care for yourself

The law often uses the word '*victim*.' In this presentation, I'll use '*victim*,' '*survivor*' or '*survivor of violence*.' The legal rights are the same.

Agenda



About the Civil Rights Department



Outreach challenges



Today's case study: California Government Code section 12945.8



4 outreach strategies



Build your plan



Resources

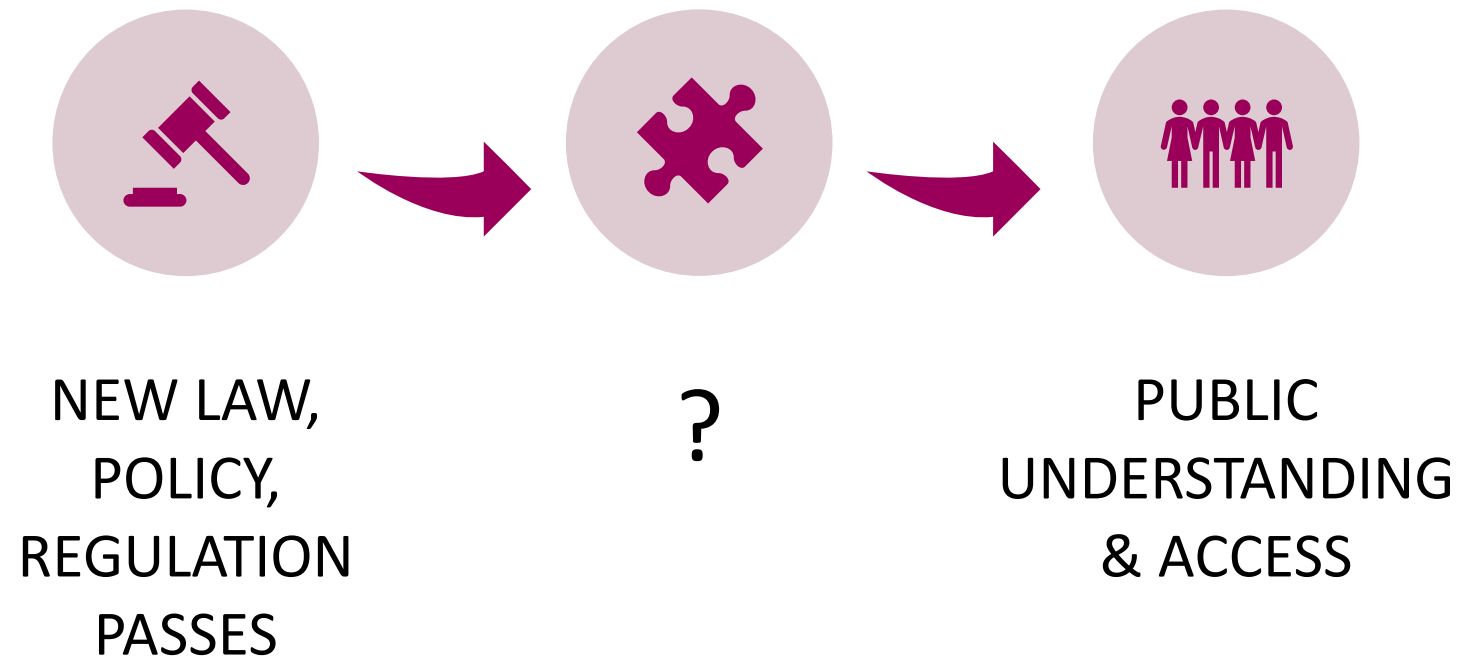


Discussion



From Statute to Street

Outreach challenges



A legal right existing on paper does not mean people know it exists, understand it, or know what to do with it.



Today's Case Study: California Government Code section 12945.8

A new civil rights responsibility for CRD



Assembly Bill No. 2499

CHAPTER 967

An act to amend Section 214 of the Code of Civil Procedure, to amend Section 48205 of the Education Code, to add Section 12945.8 to the Government Code, to amend Section 246.5 of, and to repeal Sections 230 and 230.1 of, the Labor Code, to amend Section 679.027 of the Penal Code, and to amend Section 11320.31 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to employment.

[Approved by Governor September 29, 2024. Filed with
Secretary of State September 29, 2024.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2499, Schiavo. Employment: unlawful discrimination and paid sick days: victims of violence.

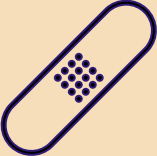
Existing law, subject to specified requirements for the employee, prohibits an employer from discharging or in any manner discriminating against an employee because of the employee's status as a victim of crime or abuse or for taking time off for specified purposes. Those purposes include serving on a jury, and, if the employee is a victim of a crime, appearing in court as a witness in any judicial proceeding, and obtaining or attempting to obtain prescribed relief. Existing law requires an employer to provide reasonable accommodations for a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking, who requests an accommodation for the safety of the victim while

Government Code section 12945.8

Beginning January 1, 2025, California:

- Expanded workplace protections for employees who are survivors of certain acts of violence or crime, or whose familiar members are survivors
- Moved enforcement of these protections to CRD

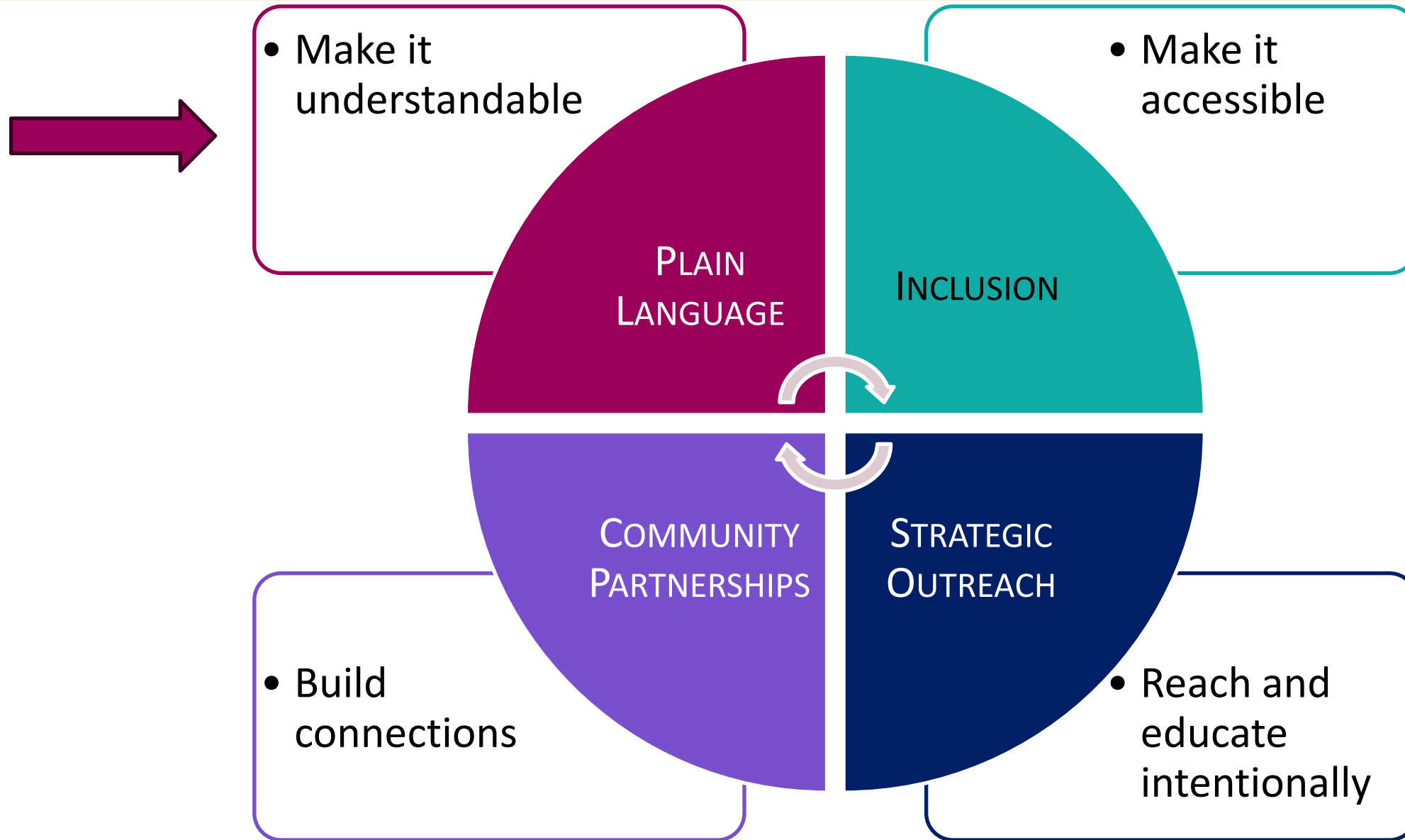
Three major protection areas

	Protection area	General purpose	Employer size
	1: Court-related time off	Time off work for certain court-related activities	Any size employer
	2: Safety & recovery time off	Time off work to address the impacts of violence	25+ workers
	3. Safety-related accommodations	Changes at work that may help improve workplace safety for an employee impacted by violence	Any size employer



The Outreach Challenge

Four strategies – Strategy #1



What is plain language?

Plain language is communication designed so the people you are trying to reach can easily find, understand, and use the information they need.

It means thinking about:

- **Who** is receiving the information
- **What** they need to know
- **How** to communicate it clearly
- **What** they need to be able to do with the information

Plain language is **audience-centered communication** – not simply simpler words

Plain language checklist

Adapted from the California Office of Data and Innovation's Innovation Hub

- ☐ Written for easy reading by the average reader (8th grade reading level or lower)
- ☐ Organized to serve the reader's needs
- ☐ Has useful headings
- ☐ Uses “you” and other pronouns to speak to readers
- ☐ Uses short sections and short sentences
- ☐ Uses the simplest tense possible
- ☐ Uses active voice, not hidden verbs
- ☐ Omits excessive words
- ☐ Uses common, familiar words
- ☐ Uses lists and tables to simplify complex material

The need for plain language communications (1 of 2)

Make the law understandable without changing what it means.

California Government Code § 12945.8 (e) (1):

An employer shall provide reasonable accommodations for an employee who is a victim or whose family member is a victim of a qualifying act of violence who requests an accommodation for the safety of the employee while at work.

This is legally precise.

But can most community members understand it?

The need for plain language communications (2 of 2)

The screenshot shows the Hemingway Editor Plus web interface. The browser address bar displays <https://hemingwayapp.com>. The editor's header includes the Hemingway logo and navigation links for File, Fix Grammar, Rewrite, Paragraph, Bold, Italic, and Link. The main text area contains the sentence: "An employer shall provide reasonable accommodations for an employee who is a victim or whose family member is a victim of a qualifying act of violence who requests an accommodation for the safety of the employee while at work." The right sidebar provides readability feedback. It shows a "Readability" score of "Post-graduate" (Poor. Aim for 9.) and a word count of 39. Below this, four colored boxes highlight specific issues: a red box stating "1 of 1 sentences is very hard to read.", a yellow box stating "0 of 1 sentences are hard to read.", a green box encouraging an upgrade to find grammar and spelling issues, a blue box noting "0 weakeners. Nice work." with a "View details" link, and a purple box stating "1 word with a simpler alternative." Three purple arrows point from the right edge of the slide to the "Post-graduate" readability score, the "1 of 1 sentences is very hard to read." box, and the "1 word with a simpler alternative." box.

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https://hemingwayapp.com

Edit your writing faster with Hemingway Editor Plus [Try Free](#)

Hemingway Editor

File **Plus** ✎ Fix Grammar **Plus** ✎ Rewrite **Plus** Paragraph ▾ B I ↻

How to use Menu ▾

Write Edit Feedback

Readability ⓘ ⓘ

Post-graduate

Poor. Aim for 9.

Words: 39

Show more stats ▾

1 of 1 sentences is very hard to read. ⓘ

0 of 1 sentences are hard to read. ⓘ

Find grammar and spelling issues with Editor Plus. **Upgrade**

0 weakeners. Nice work. ⓘ [View details](#)

1 word with a simpler alternative. ⓘ

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Reasonable accommodations in plain language

SAFETY-RELATED REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

10 | What can I do to feel safe at work after experiencing a qualifying act of violence?

Employees who experience a qualifying act of violence, or whose family member experiences a qualifying act of violence, may request changes to their workplace (called reasonable accommodations) to ensure their safety at work. Examples of accommodations include:

- Transfer, reassignment, or a modified schedule
- Changing your work telephone number
- Permission to carry a telephone at work
- Changing your workstation
- Installing a lock
- Assistance in documenting domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or another qualifying act of violence that occurs in the workplace
- Implementing safety procedures
- Adjusting job structure, workplace facility, or work requirement
- Referral to a victim assistance organization

Employers may ask for certification (see question 8) to prove the accommodation request is related to a qualifying act of violence.

11 | Does an employer have to grant my specific accommodation request?

It depends. Employers must work with employees to brainstorm which accommodation is appropriate under the circumstances. This is called the interactive process and is a requirement under the law. When deciding whether to grant an accommodation request under this law, the employer must consider any immediate danger facing the employee or their family member.

Employers may also consider whether a requested accommodation creates an undue hardship (significant time and/or expense) for the employer or would make the workplace unsafe for other employees. If that is the case, the employer does not have to grant the request. But the employer must work with the employee to identify alternative accommodations that still meet the employee's safety-related needs without placing an undue hardship on the employer.

12 | Can I ask for more than one reasonable accommodation for my safety?

There are no limits on the type or number of accommodations an employee may request. If circumstances change and you need a new or different accommodation, let your employer know. Your employer must engage in a brainstorm with the employee (called the interactive process), considering the factors described in question 10.

Translate meaning, not just words

Legal accuracy and plain language are not incongruent.

Plain language legal education should help people understand:

- **Who** is protected
- **What** protection exists
- **When** it may apply
- **What** someone can do next

Simplify the communication—not the right

A new law creates a new education challenge



Workers

What rights do I have?



Employers

What are my responsibilities?



Service Providers

How does this affect the people I support?



Community organizations

When should I connect someone with CRD?



Attorneys & Other Professionals

How does the law work?

One law.

Multiple audiences.

Different information needs.

What did this mean for CA Government Code § 12945.8 in terms of plain language?

SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF VICTIMS RIGHT TO LEAVE AND ACCOMMODATIONS



FAQ

The Civil Rights Department (CRD) enforces California laws that protect people from discrimination, harassment, and other civil rights violations. Beginning January 1, 2025, the Fair Employment and Housing Act provides workplace protections for survivors of qualifying acts of violence, as well as people with a family member who has survived a qualifying act of violence. Protections include the right to get reasonable accommodations for the worker or their family's safety. For people who work for an employer with 25 or more employees, protections also include the right to take time off work for certain activities related to the violence. Beginning January 1, 2026, victims of certain crimes are also entitled to take time off work to attend some types of court proceedings. Below are answers to frequently asked questions about these protections.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1 | What is a qualifying act of violence?

Qualifying act of violence means:

- Domestic violence
- Sexual assault
- Stalking
- Acts, conduct, or a pattern of conduct involving injury or death
- Acts, conduct, or a pattern of conduct involving a firearm (gun) or other dangerous weapon
- Acts, conduct, or a pattern of conduct involving threats of injury or death

It does not matter if anyone has been arrested for, prosecuted for, or convicted of the qualifying act of violence.

2 | Which family member(s) must experience a qualifying act of violence for me to have these protections?

Employees may request leave or accommodations when their child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse, domestic partner, or designated person experiences a qualifying act of violence. A designated person can be someone related by blood, such as an aunt or uncle, or someone who is the equivalent to a family member, such as a best friend. Employers may limit employees to taking leave for one designated person in a 12-month period.

3 | Can my employer discriminate or retaliate against me or my family member for being a victim of a qualifying act of violence?

No. An employer cannot fire, discriminate against, or retaliate against an employee because they are, or their family member is, a victim of a qualifying act of violence.

CRD E21Q-ENG / December 2025

SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF VICTIMS RIGHT TO LEAVE AND ACCOMMODATIONS



FAQ

SAFETY-RELATED REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

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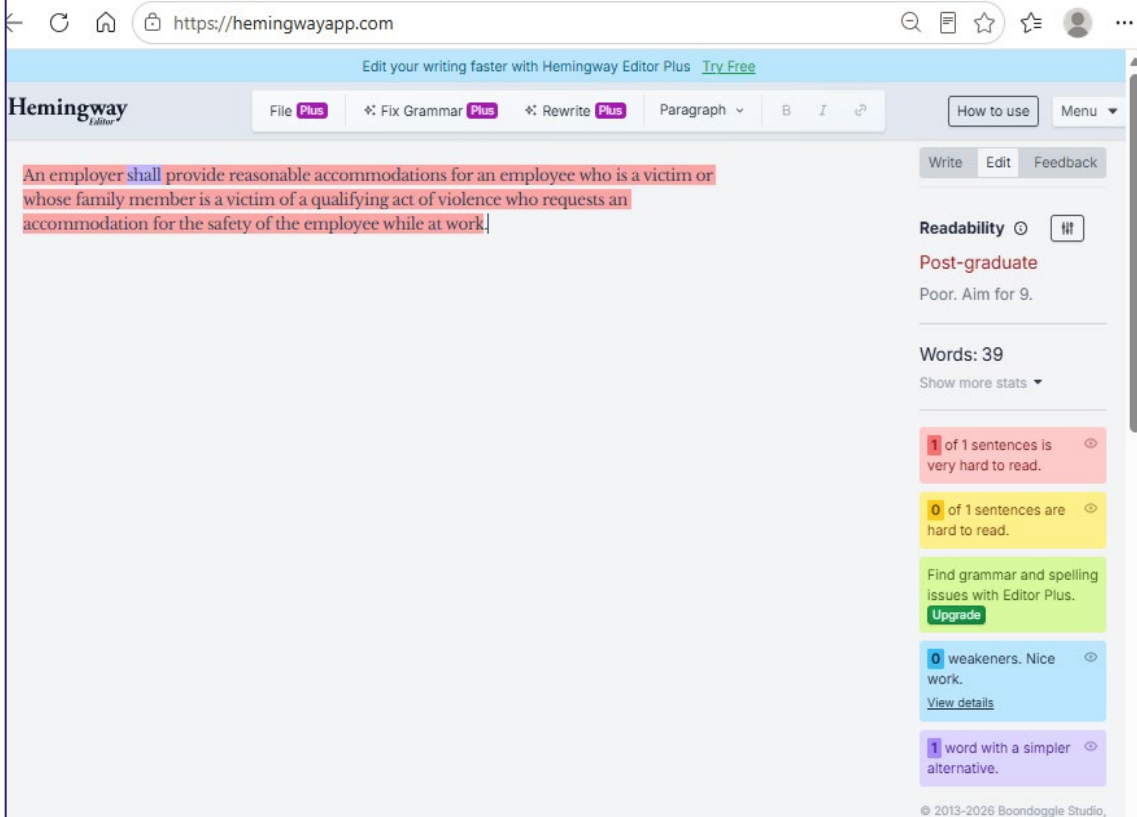
CRD E21Q-ENG / December 2025

Your turn: Find the essential message

Choose one law, initiative, or civil rights issue you want to work on today.

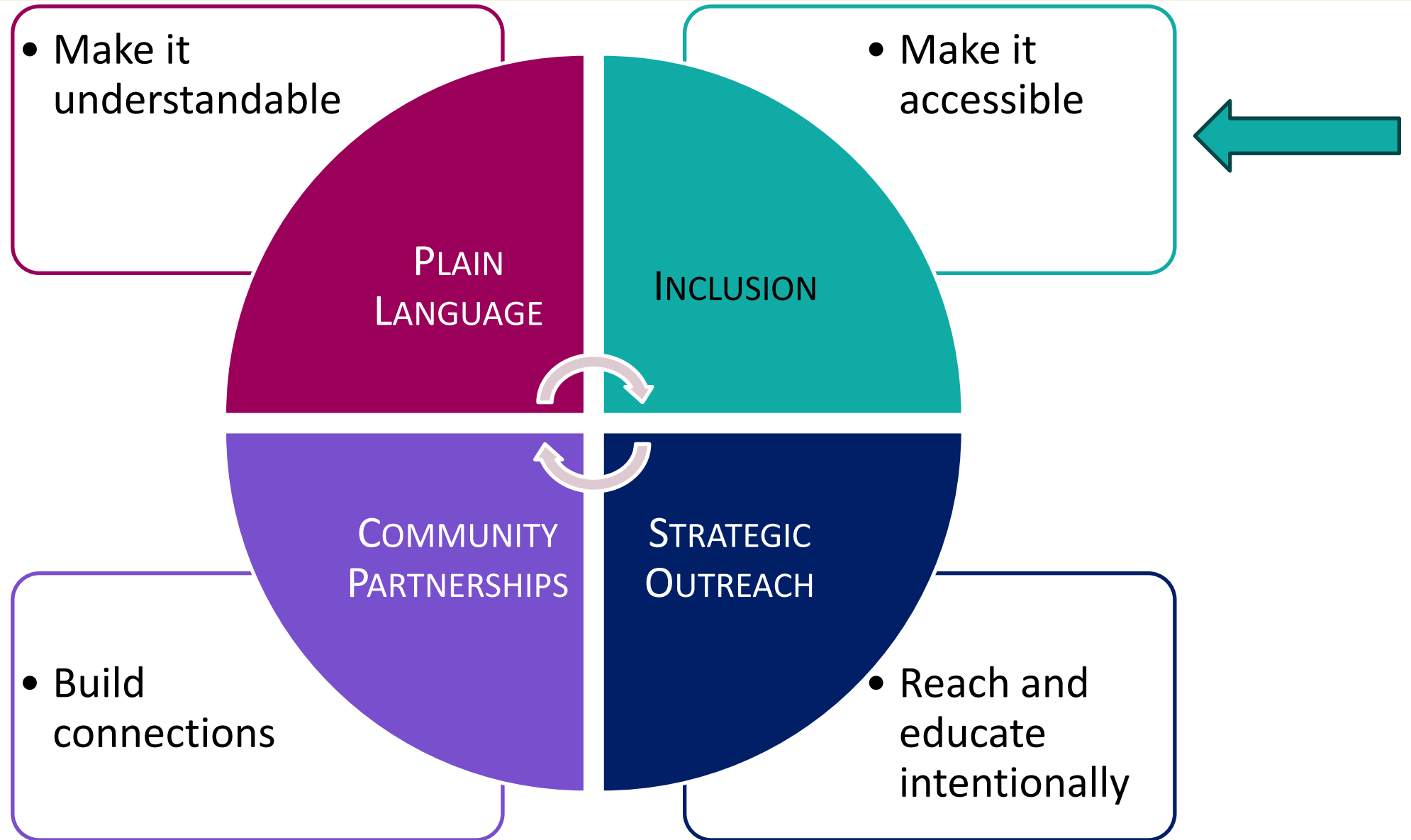
1. What is **one** thing your audience absolutely needs to understand?
2. How would you explain it without legal or technical jargon?
3. What could you remove without losing accuracy?

Resource: Hemingway



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Four strategies – strategy #2



Inclusive outreach and education

What does inclusive outreach require?

Note:

I am **not** discussing legal obligations.

LANGUAGE ACCESS

- What languages do our communities use? What are emerging languages?
- Are translated materials available?
- Is interpretation available when needed?
- Are translations accurate, understandable, and culturally appropriate?

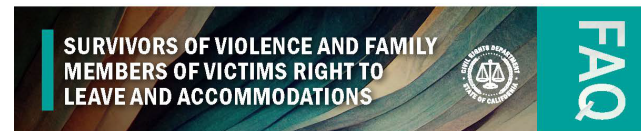
DISABILITY INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY

- Are materials accessible to people with disabilities?
- Are presentations and events accessible?
- Are digital materials compatible with assistive technology?
- Are we communicating information in multiple ways?

What did this mean for CA Government Code § 12945.8 in terms of inclusion?

LANGUAGE ACCESS

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1. English | 10. Punjabi |
| 2. Arabic | 11. Russian |
| 3. Armenian | 12. Spanish |
| 4. Chinese | 13. Tagalog |
| 5. Farsi | 14. Thai |
| 6. Hindi | 15. Vietnamese |
| 7. Japanese | |
| 8. Khmer | |
| 9. Korean | |



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CRD E21Q-ENG / December 2025

DISABILITY INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY

1. Remediation to ensure compatibility with screen readers
2. Use of contrasting colors and large fonts

Your turn: What does inclusive outreach look like?

For your project:

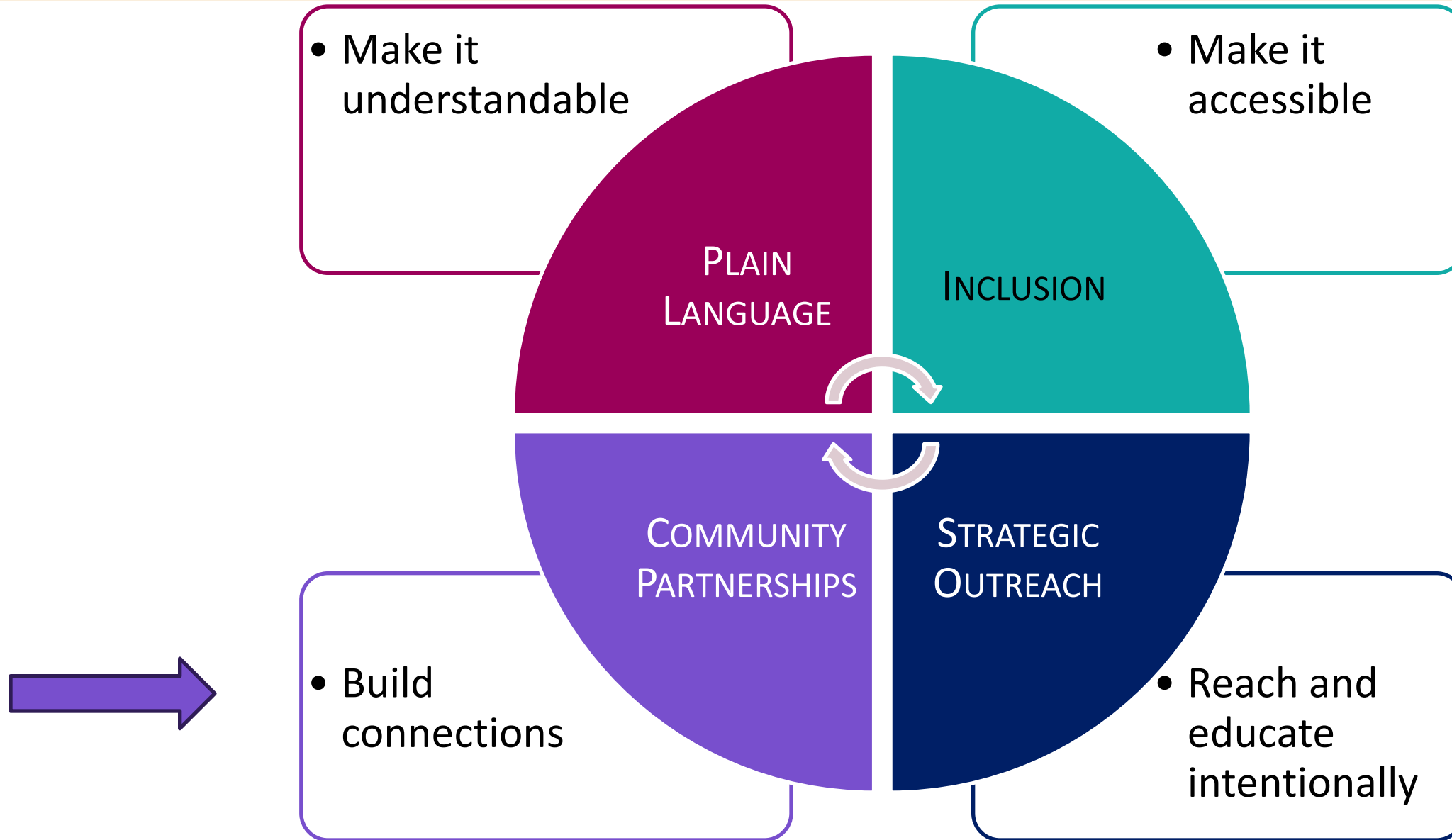
Language Access:

- What languages do your communities use, including emerging and sign languages?
- Where might interpretation or translation be needed?

Disability Inclusion & Accessibility:

- What accessibility barriers could your materials, events, or digital content create?
- How could you design around those barriers?

Four strategies – strategy #3



Building community partnerships

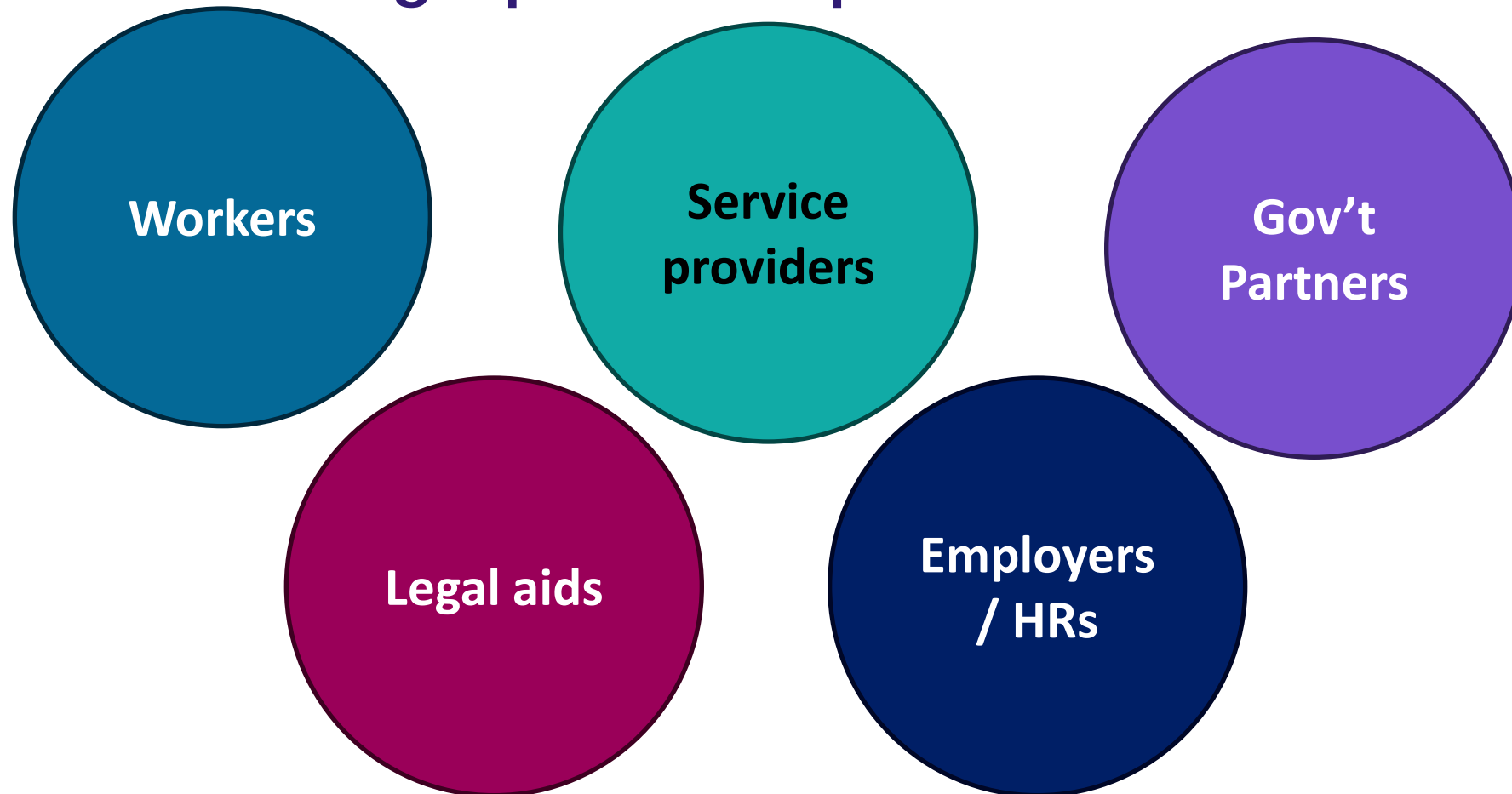
Community partnerships are relationships between government agencies and organizations that know, serve, or have trusted relationships with the communities we want to reach.

Partners are **trusted messengers** who can help agencies:

- Understand – better understand community needs, questions, and barriers
- Reach – connect with people through existing, trusted networks
- Educate – share accurate information and resources
- Learn – receive feedback that can improve outreach and education



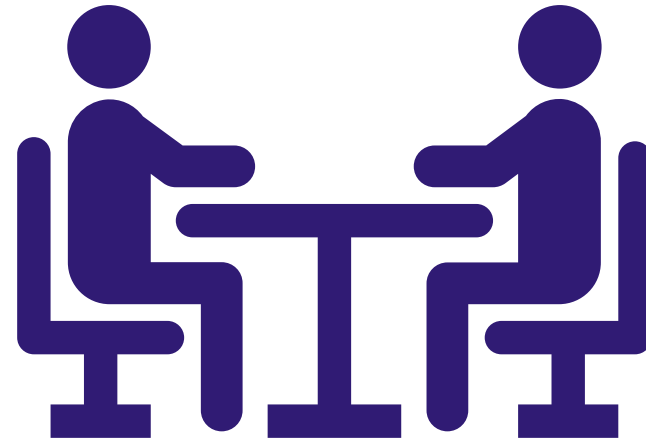
What did this mean for CA Government Code § 12945.8 in terms of strategic partnerships?



Your turn: map your partners

For your project:

- Who already serves your audience?
- Who does your audience trust?
- Who could help you understand what the community needs?
- What can your agency offer them?



Four strategies – strategy #4



What is strategic outreach?

Strategic outreach is intentionally identifying who you need to reach and designing your outreach around that audience.

Ask:

- Who needs this information?
- What does this audience need to know?
- How and where can we effectively reach and educate them?
- What should they know or be able to do afterward?
- How will we know?

The same law may require different messages, resources, and approaches for different audiences.

What did this mean for CA Government Code § 12945.8 in terms of strategic outreach?

Survivors

- Workers
 - FAQs
 - Coming soon: postcards
- Employers
 - Employer notice to employees
 - Employer / HR education
- Service providers
 - Service provider training

Same law.
Different audiences.
Different approaches

Supporting Survivors' Workplace Rights in California
A presentation for service providers



Ana Mendoza (she/her), Attorney
Outreach & Education Unit



**Civil Rights
Department**
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

 CALIFORNIA PARTNERSHIP TO
End Domestic Violence

**Building Thriving
Communities**

Statewide Domestic Violence Conference

November 18-19, 2026



Your turn: Map your outreach

For your project: Complete one row for each priority audience. (*Example below.*)

AUDIENCE	WHAT DO THEY NEED?	DESIRED ACTION	MESSENGER / PARTNER	FORMAT / CHANNEL
<i>Workers who are survivors of violence</i>	<i>Know that CA law may provide workplace protections</i> <i>Know to come to CRD for more information or file an intake</i>	<i>Recognize their rights</i> <i>Request workplace protections when needed</i> <i>Know to seek information from CRD (or file intakes)</i>	<i>Survivor-service organizations, legal aid, worker organizations, community-based organizations</i>	<i>Plain language multilingual fact sheets</i> <i>Partner trainings</i> <i>Community presentations</i> <i>Community outreach at events</i>



Your outreach and education plan

Responding to outreach challenges



A legal right existing on paper does not mean people know it exists, understand it, or know what to do with it.

Your draft outreach and education plan



**What will you take back with you
from our time together today?**



Resources



Resources for your outreach and education projects

PLAIN LANGUAGE

- **California Office of Data & Innovation** – [Design content materials](#), including a plain language [checklist](#)
- **US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** – [Plain language resources](#), including examples of outreach materials
- **Hemingway Editor** – [free & paid online tool](#) to check grade level, complex sentences, passive voice, and other readability issues

INCLUSION

- **US Census Bureau – Language Spoken at Home / ACS** - Language data for use by local, state, tribal, and federal agencies to plan government programs
- **US ADA.gov** – [Practical federal guidance](#) on accessible communication with people with vision, hearing, and speech disabilities.
- **Section508.gov** – [Testing tools](#) to ensure websites and digital services are accessible



CRD Resources





CALIFORNIA PROTECTS THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS

FACT SHEET

CRD is committed to ensuring that all Californians, regardless of immigration status, are free from discrimination.

EMPLOYMENT

You are protected from being fired, harassed at work, treated differently than co-workers with the same job, or discriminated against based on race, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age (40 and over), a physical or mental disability, or other characteristics. In addition, there are protections related to immigration status, citizenship, and language.

EXAMPLES OF UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION

- **National Origin/Ancestry.** "My employer treats employees from a particular country (or a particular ancestry) differently than employees originally from the United States, even though we do the same job and have the same experience."
- **Harassment.** "My co-worker made derogatory comments about my accent because I am originally from the United States. My employer did nothing to stop it."
- **English Only.** "My employer required me to speak English at work, even though I speak English well, and even though there was no reason for this rule."
- **Accent.** "My employer treated me differently because I speak English with an accent, even though my co-workers and customers understand me."

CALIFORNIA LAW PROTECTS WORKERS FROM AGE DISCRIMINATION

FACT SHEET

California law protects job applicants and employees aged 40 and older from discrimination based on age. California recognizes that people aged 40 and older face unique obstacles in the later phases of their careers and need protection from age-related biases and stereotypes.

WHAT IS WORKPLACE AGE DISCRIMINATION?

California's Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) makes it illegal for an employer to discriminate against or harass an employee or job applicant based on protected characteristics including age. In the employment context, people aged 40 and older are protected from age discrimination.

The law also provides protections when an employer discriminates against someone based on the mistaken belief the person is 40 or older based on their association with a person aged 40 or older. FEHA's protections against discrimination apply to private employers with five or more employees as well as public employers (state and local). The protections against harassment apply to all employers.

EXAMPLES OF AGE DISCRIMINATION IN CALIFORNIA

Age discrimination can take different forms. Sometimes discrimination is obvious, while other times it is more subtle. The following are examples of age discrimination.

Excluding older people when hiring

In the hiring process, it is generally against the law for employers to refuse to consider people aged 40 and older as potential candidates. Examples of unlawful actions include:

- Limiting how much experience a candidate can have (for example, "candidate should have no more than seven years of experience")

CIVIL RIGHTS DEPARTMENT



HARASSMENT PREVENTION GUIDE

For California Employers



CRD written resources

- [Employment](#)
 - [Right to Sue requests](#)
 - [Legally required postings](#)
- [Housing](#)
 - [Housing provider resources](#)
- [Unruh Civil Rights Act](#)
- [Ralph Civil Rights Act](#)
- [Human trafficking, U Visas, and T Visas](#)
- [Complaint process](#)
- [Outreach and education materials](#)
- [CRD training request form](#)

Live and recorded CRD webinars

- Visit [CRD's website](#) to sign up
 - Three webinars each month
 - Wednesdays at 11 AM
 - Held on Zoom
 - Open to anyone
- Each month CRD provides a training on
 - housing,
 - employment, and
 - special topic
- Visit [CRD's YouTube channel](#) to watch recorded webinars



Accessibility for people with disabilities

CRD will assist anyone who needs help accessing our services and information, including filing a complaint.

Contact us to arrange an accommodation if you have a disability:

- 800-884-1684
- California Relay Service at 711
- Accommodations@calcivilrights.ca.gov

Services in other languages

CRD offers interpretive services (spoken) and some translation services (written) for people who speak or read languages other than English.

Contact us to request interpretation or translation services:

- 800-884-1684
- California Relay Service at 711
- Contact.Center@calcivilrights.ca.gov



FAQ on Safety Leave & Accommodations

SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF VICTIMS RIGHT TO LEAVE AND ACCOMMODATIONS



FAQ

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- [English \(PDF\)](#)
- [Arabic \(PDF\)](#)
- [Armenian \(PDF\)](#)
- [Chinese \(PDF\)](#)
- [Farsi \(PDF\)](#)
- [Hindi \(PDF\)](#)
- [Japanese \(PDF\)](#)
- [Khmer \(PDF\)](#)
- [Korean \(PDF\)](#)
- [Punjabi \(PDF\)](#)
- [Russian \(PDF\)](#)
- [Spanish \(PDF\)](#)
- [Tagalog \(PDF\)](#)
- [Thai \(PDF\)](#)
- [Vietnamese \(PDF\)](#)

CRD notices & FAQs on Survivors of Violence & Family Members Rights to Leave & Accommodations

Survivor/Victim Leave



bit.ly/SurvivorLeave
(Google Drive Folder)

Thank you!

For more information or to file a complaint please contact CRD:

Website: www.calcivilrights.ca.gov

Phone: Contact Center: 800-884-1684 (voice)

California's Relay Service at 711

Email: contact.center@calcivilrights.ca.gov





Questions?

