



By Nancy Zarenda

California is the most ethnically and linguistically diverse state in the nation where over 200 languages are spoken (Judicial Council of California), 44% of residents speak a language other than English at home, and seven million Californians over five years of age report they speak English less than well (US Census). The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has an impressive past record of accomplishments and commitment to serving millions of language-diverse ratepayers and consumers by its outreach, advocacy, and protective regulations...and, here is why.

Commissioner Emeritus Rachelle Chong (2006-2009) was a relentless champion of language access and an advocate for limited English proficient (LEP) consumers, who include persons who are deaf and hard of hearing, blind and visually impaired, and those with disabilities. She confronted the pervasive problem of fraud and language abuse in LEP communities by bad actor telecommunications companies and took the lead on public forums and instituting rulemaking. As a groundbreaker in reforming telephone equipment programs for persons with deafness and disabilities, Rachelle Chong was honored by the World Institute on Disability for her leadership at CPUC.

During Chong's tenure, in alignment with President Michael Peevey's unwavering commitment to diversity, CPUC was a frontrunner in working toward ensuring that LEP consumers and ratepayers receive equitable and fair public services and consideration. Chong's findings contributed to the CPUC 2006 Report, *Challenges Facing Consumers With Limited English Skills In The Rapidly Changing Telecommunications Marketplace*, a study required by the CPUC Consumer Protection Initiative that was adopted to empower consumers and prevent fraud in the rapidly changing telecommunications industry.

At that time, California Utilities Diversity Council (CUDC) was a robust community and corporate driven organization designed to increase diversity and inclusion in the utility space. CUDC's Customer Service and Marketing Committee implemented an unprecedented survey of language access values and practices across utility company members and CPUC. The inferences led to the development of CUDC's Language Access Principles that were adopted by the CPUC as guidance for utility companies. More information about CUDC Language Access Principles can be found in the 2007 CUDC Annual Report.

Rachelle Chong was appointed to the Federal Trade Commission by President Bill Clinton, was a law partner in multi-national law firms, a General Counsel and lead regulatory officer for three start-ups and the largest cable company in the nation. She is currently Principal at Law Offices of Rachelle Chong in San Francisco, CA.

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