Language Access Services – Spring 2020 Updates

More than 200 languages and dialects are spoken in California, with nearly 7 million Californians (19%) reporting that they speak English "less than very well." Without proper language assistance, limited-English-proficient (LEP) court users and other members of the public may be excluded from meaningful participation in the judicial court process.

A Strategic Plan for Language Access

- On January 22, 2015, the Judicial Council adopted the *Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts*, which provides a consistent statewide approach to ensure language access for all LEP court users in all 58 superior courts.
- Judicial Council Language Access Services (LAS) works with the Language Access Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee on Providing Access and Fairness (PAF) and the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel (CIAP) to develop policy and support branch efforts to achieve and maintain access to justice for California's limited English proficient (LEP) and deaf and hearing-impaired court users.

Highlights of Language Access Services Achievements in 2019

- ✓ **Civil Expansion.** As of June 2019, all 58 courts are now able to provide court interpreters in all eight civil priority levels dictated by statute (Evidence Code, § 756). The languages provided, and the estimated interpreter coverage for each priority, vary by court.
- ✓ **Funding.** For 2019-20, the annual appropriation for the court interpreter fund increased to $120.7 million (ongoing funding was added through a Budget Change Proposal to further advance the *Strategic Plan for Language Access*).
- ✓ **Signage and Technology Grant Program.** In September 2019, the council approved a Language Access Signage and Technology Grant Program. The 2018 Budget included ongoing funding of $1 million/year for signage and $1.55 million/year for technology infrastructure support and equipment needs for the superior courts and council.
- ✓ **Public Outreach Materials.** Multilingual materials (include easy-to-understand flyers, brochures, and materials for web placement, as well as short animated videos and public service announcements) were added to the Language Access Toolkit to educate LEP court users across the state and assist them in navigating the courts.
- ✓ **Rule 1.300 (effective September 1, 2019).** In May 2019, the council approved Rule 1.300 (and related forms) to provide clear guidance on the provision of language assistance in court-ordered programs and services. Judicial Council staff developed informational materials to assist courts with implementing Rule 1.300.
- ✓ **Video Remote Interpreting (VRI).** In March 2019, the council approved updated Language Access Plan guidelines for VRI, which include recommended minimum technology guidelines. The council also voted to create a new VRI program in 2020 for the judicial branch to expand LEP court user access to qualified interpreters.

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- ✓ **California Court Interpreter Credential Review Procedures, Filing a Complaint (effective January 1, 2020).** In September 2019, the council adopted the California Court Interpreter Credential Review Procedures, which provide guidelines for filing a complaint alleging professional misconduct or wrongdoing regarding a California certified or registered interpreter.

- ✓ **Compliance Requirements for Certified and Registered Court Interpreters.** In September 2019, court interpreters were notified of changes and updates to the Compliance Requirements for Certified Court and Registered Interpreters and information was included in their 2019 Annual Renewal and Compliance packet.

Looking Forward: 2020

- ✓ **Funding.** The Governor's Proposed Budget for 2020 includes $8.9 million General Fund in 2020-21 and $8.5 million annually thereafter for increased court interpreter costs and to purchase equipment for the newly established VRI Program. If approved, this would bring the total funding for the court interpreter fund to $130 million annually.

- ✓ **2020 Language Need and Interpreter Use Study.** Language Access Services conducted the five-year study on language need and interpreter use in court proceedings, which is required under Government Code section 68563, with findings and recommendations. The study will go to the council for approval at its meeting in May 2020, and thereafter, will be sent to the Governor and Legislature and posted to the Court Interpreters Program webpage at: https://www.courts.ca.gov/2686.htm.

- ✓ **Covid-19 Crisis.** Due to the unprecedented Covid-19 health crisis, Language Access Services is working closely with Language Access Representatives across the state to develop resources for courts, including telephonic or video remote solutions, recommendations to ensure court interpreter safety, and the translation of common signs and notices for the public.

- ✓ **Recruitment and Professional Development of Court Interpreters.** The Court Interpreters Program continues to develop a more robust statewide interpreter recruitment initiative, and support trainings to help "near passers" of the interpreting exam. Recruitment of qualified court interpreters and bilingual staff is an ongoing responsibility for the judicial branch to serve California's LEP and deaf and hearing-impaired court users.

For more information:

Language Access: http://www.courts.ca.gov/languageaccess.htm

Language Access Toolkit: https://www.courts.ca.gov/lap-toolkit-courts.htm

Court Interpreters Program: https://www.courts.ca.gov/programs-interpreters.htm