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FACT SHEET **October 2025**

Language Access Implementation

California is home to one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse populations in the world. This extraordinary diversity is among the state's greatest assets. This diversity also poses unique challenges, as nearly 6.4 million Californians who are limited English proficient (LEP) and cannot access the courts without significant language assistance. To address the challenges this presents, the Judicial Council of California, the policymaking body of the California courts, has a standing Language Access Subcommittee and a Language Access Services Program that assists courts in the provision of language access services to court users throughout the state who are LEP, as well as for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

What is Language Access in the California Courts and How Does It Impact Court Users?

Language access provides services and resources to individuals who are LEP, deaf, or hard of hearing. As defined by the U.S. Department of Justice, LEP individuals are persons who do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English.[1]

In California, the most diverse state in the country:

- Over 200 languages/dialects are spoken;
- Approximately 6.4 million individuals speak English "less than very well"; and
- 17.2% of Californians are LEP and cannot access the court system without language help.[2]

Court users come to courthouses because they have a problem they cannot resolve on their own. Without proper language assistance, LEP, deaf, and hard of hearing court users may be excluded from meaningful participation in the judicial process. Many of these litigants have

[1] *Limited English Proficiency,* U.S. Dept. of Justice
[2] Source: U.S. Census, 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

appeared without an attorney and have had to rely on friends and family members (who may not understand legal terminology or court procedures) to act as interpreters. Further, court users' language needs are not limited to the courtroom: the need for language assistance extends to all points of contact with the public, including self-help centers, filings windows, court-connected clinics, telephone assistance, and website and online services.

Statewide Language Access Plan

On January 22, 2015, the Judicial Council adopted the *Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts* (the Language Access Plan or LAP) to provide recommendations, guidance, and a consistent statewide approach to ensure language access throughout the courts. The overarching goal of the plan is ensuring access to justice for all court users. Plan recommendations include efforts to expand and improve data collection; expanding court interpreters to all civil proceedings; appropriate use of technology to provide access in courtroom proceedings and at counters and self-help centers; providing high-quality multilingual translation and signage; ensuring appropriate recruitment and training of language access providers; providing branch education and training on language access; conducting outreach to communities regarding language access services; and identifying systems, funding, and legislation necessary to support implementation of the plan.

Language Access Plan Implementation Task Force

From March 2015 to February 2019, the Language Access Plan Implementation Task Force, which was chaired by Justice Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, oversaw the implementation of the Language Access Plan. During this four-year period, working closely with the courts and the Judicial Council, the task force made significant progress in achieving most of the plan's 75 recommendations. This progress included increased funding for expansion of interpreter services in civil, as well as new funding for signage and technology initiatives; development of new rules and legislation; conduct of a pilot for video remote interpreting; and establishment of the Language Access Toolkit as an online resource for the courts and public.

Language Access Subcommittee, Advisory Committee on Providing Access and Fairness

Effective March 2019, with the sunset of the task force, the Judicial Council approved creation of a new Language Access Subcommittee under the Advisory Committee on Providing Access and Fairness (PAF). The standing subcommittee, chaired by Justice Victor A. Rodriguez, works to ensure the continuation of efforts

to achieve and maintain access to justice for California's LEP, deaf, and hard of hearing court users, including efforts to support the goals and remaining ongoing recommendations of the LAP for the branch. The subcommittee makes recommendations to the PAF in the areas of grants, technology, education, and resources, as well as on legislative and rules of court proposals to enhance language access services throughout the judicial branch.

Ongoing and Focused Language Access Services Program Projects

As part of the Leadership Support Services office, the Language Access Services Program is comprised of the Language Access Implementation unit and the Court Interpreters Program. Current language access projects include:

- Interpreter services funding needs;
- Interpreter usage data analytics and data collection improvements;
- Language access technology solutions, including resource and training development for video remote interpreting (VRI);
- Language Access Signage and Technology Grant Program;
- Translations of Judicial Council court forms and web content;
- Resource and training development to assist LEP, deaf, and hard of hearing court users; and
- Interpreter initiatives for recruitment, testing, and training, including exam preparation trainings (near passer trainings) and the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program.

Public Participation

Unless otherwise indicated, the PAF Language Access Subcommittee business meetings are open to the public. Members of the public are welcome to request to speak at an open subcommittee meeting or submit written comments, suggestions, or ideas relating to language access matters.

To request to speak at a subcommittee meeting or submit written comments, please email: LAP@jud.ca.gov. Please check the advisory committee meetings page for upcoming meetings.

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Resources:

Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts (January 2015)

Language Access Implementation

Advisory Committee on Providing Access and Fairness

California Courts Self-Help Guide
- Request an Interpreter
- Multilingual Language Resources