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## FACT SHEET

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### Language Access

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 for the delivery of government services. Nearly 7 million Californians cannot access the courts without significant language assistance. To address the challenges this presents, the Judicial Council of California, the policy-making body of the California courts, is undertaking implementation of a statewide language access plan that provides a consistent direction for language access throughout the judiciary.

#### What is Language Access?

Language access allows limited-English-proficient (LEP) individuals access to a wide range of services. 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.

In California, the most diverse state in the country:

- Over 200 languages are spoken;
- 44% of households speak a language other than English;
- Nearly 7 million individuals speak English “less than very well”; and
- 19% of Californians cannot access the court system without language help.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2015)

#### How Language Access Impacts Court Users

Court users come to courthouses because they have a problem that they cannot resolve on their own.

Without proper language assistance, LEP court users may be excluded from meaningful participation in the judicial process. Many LEP litigants appear 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, LEP 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, filing windows, court-connected clinics, telephone assistance, and beyond.

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 California in all 58 superior courts. The plan sets the goal that beginning immediately where resources permit, and by 2017, qualified interpreters will be provided in the California courts to LEP court users, at no cost to the LEP court user, in all courtroom proceedings. By 2020, the goal is to provide court interpreters in all court-ordered, court-operated events.

#### **Language Access Plan Implementation Task Force**

The Language Access Plan Implementation Task Force, chaired by Supreme Court Justice Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, was formed in March 2015, and advises the Judicial Council on implementation of the recommendations in the strategic plan. The Task Force includes representatives of key stakeholders in the provision of language access services in the courts, including, but not limited to, judicial officers, court administrators, court interpreters, legal services providers, and community leaders (Visit the [Task Force](#) web page to view the current roster).

The Task Force's charge is to turn the Language Access Plan into a practical roadmap for courts by creating an implementation plan for full implementation in all 58 superior courts. The Task Force will:

- Identify existing efficiencies that can enhance language access for all LEP court users;
- Propose an incremental, multiyear approach to enhancing language access in the California courts;
- Design a strategy for developing the additional resources needed for full language access; and

- Develop mechanisms to oversee and monitor the implementation of the plan.

### **Public Participation**

The Task Force welcomes public participation, and encourages the public to:

- Attend and participate in the Task Force's public business meetings and community outreach meetings;
- Provide written comments, suggestions, or ideas; and
- Keep informed about the progress of the plan and share information with your communities.

Please check the Task Force's web page to learn more about progress regarding strategic plan implementation, upcoming meetings, and how you can participate. To submit written comments regarding implementation of the Language Access Plan, please write to [LAP@jud.ca.gov](mailto:LAP@jud.ca.gov).

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*Additional resources:*

- <http://www.courts.ca.gov/LAP.htm>
- <http://www.courts.ca.gov/languageaccess.htm>
- <http://www.courts.ca.gov/courtinterpreters>
- [www.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp.htm](http://www.courts.ca.gov/selfhelp.htm)
- [www.sucorte.ca.gov](http://www.sucorte.ca.gov)