



**JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF CALIFORNIA**

455 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, CA  
94102-3688  
Tel. 415-865-4200  
Fax 415-865-4205  
www.courts.ca.gov

## **FACT SHEET**

**September 2023**

---

# **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 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 limited English proficient (LEP).

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

Language access provides LEP individuals access to a wide range of language 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 cannot access the court system without language help.<sup>2</sup>

Court users come to courthouses because they have a problem 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 have

---

<sup>1</sup> *Limited English Proficiency*, U.S. Dept. of Justice

<sup>2</sup> 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, 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, 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, especially for LEP 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 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 technology, education, and translation, 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 Center for Families, Children & the Courts, the Language Access Services Program is composed of the Language Access Implementation Unit and the Court Interpreters Program Unit. Current language access projects include:

- Civil expansion and funding needs;
- Development of rules and policies;
- Data collection improvements and metrics;
- Language access technological solutions, including establishment of a Remote/Hybrid (Video Remote Interpreting) Program;
- Signage and Technology Grant Program and other grant opportunities;
- Translation services responsibilities;
- Education and training to assist LEP court users; and
- Interpreter issues, including: recruitment, testing, and training.

### **Public Participation**

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

To submit written comments, please email: [LAP@jud.ca.gov](mailto:LAP@jud.ca.gov). Please check the advisory committee meetings [page](#) for upcoming meetings.

### **Contacts:**

Elizabeth Tam-Helmuth, Senior Analyst, [elizabeth.tam@jud.ca.gov](mailto:elizabeth.tam@jud.ca.gov)

*Additional resources:*

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

[https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/CLASP\\_report\\_060514.pdf](https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/CLASP_report_060514.pdf)

Language Access Implementation,

<https://www.courts.ca.gov/languageaccess.htm>

Advisory Committee on Providing Access and Fairness,

<https://www.courts.ca.gov/accessfairnesscomm.htm>

Self-Help, <https://selfhelp.courts.ca.gov/>