

# Language Access Services Updates February 2021



JUDICIAL COUNCIL  
OF CALIFORNIA

OPERATIONS AND PROGRAMS DIVISION

CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN & THE COURTS



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.

## Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts

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), Court Interpreters Advisory Panel (CIAP) and other council advisory bodies 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.

## 2020 Language Access Services Highlights

- ✓ **COVID-19 Pandemic.** In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Language Access Services worked with Judicial Council staff and Language Access Representatives to develop resources for courts, including remote solutions, recommendations to ensure court interpreter safety and translations of [common signs and notices](#) for the public. Since March 2020, staff conducted monthly webinar meetings with Language Access Representatives to keep the courts regularly connected, informed, and to share guidance and suggestions, including the use of technology.
- ✓ **2020 Language Need and Interpreter Use Study.** At its May 2020 meeting, the Judicial Council approved the [2020 Language Need and Interpreter Use Study](#). Language Access Services conducted the five-year study with findings and recommendations on language need and interpreter use in court proceedings, which is required under Government Code section 68563.
- ✓ **Funding.** For 2020-21, the annual appropriation for the Court Interpreter Program (TCTF 0150037) increased to approximately \$130 million (ongoing funding was added through a Budget Change Proposal to further advance the *Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts*).
- ✓ **Video Remote Interpreting (VRI).** The 2020 Budget Act also included \$316,000 to implement VRI in 15 courthouses, along with council staff positions. Planning efforts are underway to establish a VRI program for the judicial branch to expand LEP court user access to qualified interpreters, including VRI trainings for judicial officers, court staff, and court interpreters.

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- ✓ **Signage and Technology Grant Program.** In April 2020 and November 2020, the council approved grants for various court signage and technology initiatives. The 2018 Budget Act 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 (distributed as grants) and council. The next cycle of the grant program will launch in Spring 2021.
- ✓ **Court Interpreter Data Collection System (CIDCS) Interpreter Portal.** Language Access Services implemented the optional CIDCS interpreter portal in Fall 2020. The portal allows court interpreters to update information on their profile and, if permitted by the courts, to enter their daily activity log (case event) information. Staff conducted an optional webinar training on the portal with interested court interpreters and court staff.

## Additional Projects for 2021

- ✓ **Annual Language Access Survey.** As a follow-up to surveys conducted in 2016–20, the Language Access Services Program will send out the language access survey in Summer 2021 to all 58 superior courts in the state to determine courts' provision of language access services as of June 30, 2021, as well as areas that may need improvement.
- ✓ **California Rules of Court, Rule 1.300 (Access to programs, services, and professionals).** The National Center for State Courts will conduct a comprehensive review of strategies utilized by local courts and other states to support access to programs and services. In 2021, a draft report on findings will include recommendations and strategies for providing linguistically accessible court-ordered programs and services, to support courts with implementation of Rule 1.300.
- ✓ **Model Translation Guidelines for Courts.** Language Access Services will develop model translation guidelines for courts that provide guidance on the identification of vital documents for translation, including local forms, local court web content and other public-facing materials. The model translation guidelines will also provide guidance on the identification of languages for translation and procuring the services of professional translators. Specific guidance will be included for courts on use of machine translation for local forms, documents and web content.
- ✓ **Public Outreach Campaign.** For wider dissemination of multilingual educational materials hosted on the Language Access Toolkit, a public outreach campaign will take place in 2021 and include conduct of three educational webinars; direct outreach to various court stakeholders; and media buys/placements through ethnic media outlets, in order to educate LEP court users and communities across the state and to assist them in navigating the courts.

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- ✓ **Bilingual Interpreting Examination.** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bilingual Interpreting Examinations (BIEs) were canceled in all California locations in 2020, in order to adhere to the Governor's health and safety directives. The Court Interpreters Program is making plans to resume testing in 2021 under approved safety protocols.
- ✓ **Near Passer Trainings for Court Interpreter Candidates.** The Court Interpreters Program plans to conduct near passer trainings for court interpreter candidates beginning in May 2021. The near passer trainings will provide exam preparation and support for candidates with near passing scores to pass the BIE.

## For More Information

- Language Access: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/languageaccess.htm>
- Language Access Toolkit: <https://www.courts.ca.gov/lap-toolkit-courts.htm>
- Public Outreach: <https://www.courts.ca.gov/42863.htm>
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI): <https://www.courts.ca.gov/VRI.htm>
- Court Interpreters Program: <https://www.courts.ca.gov/programs-interpreters.htm>

## Contact

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