



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
COMMON PLEAS COURT - GENERAL DIVISION

Language Access Plan

Effective Date: May 1, 2024

Montgomery County Common Pleas Court, General Division
LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN
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I. LEGAL BASIS AND PURPOSE

This document serves as the Language Access Plan (“LAP”) for the Montgomery County Common Pleas Court, General Division (“Court”) to provide services to limited English proficient (“LEP”) individuals in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; 45 C.F.R. § 80 et seq; and 28 C.F.R. § 42 et seq. The purpose of this plan is to provide a framework for the provision of timely and reasonable language assistance to LEP persons who come in contact with the Court.

The Supreme Court of Ohio provides the following advisement:

In order to comply with the prohibition against national origin discrimination in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, et. seq., the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, 42 U.S.C. 3789d(c), and 28 C.F.R. Part 42, Subparts C and D, recipients of federal funds must provide meaningful access to limited English proficient (LEP) individuals. *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974). The U.S. Department of Justice advises that practices, such as charging for interpretation and translation services or seeking recoupment for those costs, significantly impair, restrict, or preclude the participation of LEP individuals in the judicial system and are inconsistent with recipients’ Title VI obligations. For more information, please refer to Guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice to state court justices and administrators’ Letter from Assistant Attorney of the Civil Rights Division to Chief Justices and State Court Administrators (Aug. 16, 2010); Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons, 67 Fed. Reg. 41455 (June 18, 2002).

This LAP is developed to ensure equal access to court services for LEP persons and persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Although deaf and hard of hearing individuals are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) rather than Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, they have been included in this plan insofar as they relate to our policy of access to justice and equal protection under the law. Protections for individuals with qualifying disabilities includes the following:

- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires public entities, including state and local courts, to provide equal access to their programs and services. 42 U.S.C. §§ 12131-12134.

- Public entities are required to “take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, and members of the public with disabilities are as effective as communications with others.” 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a).
- Public entities must “furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to afford an individual with a disability an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a service, program, or activity conducted by a public entity.” 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(b)(1).
- These auxiliary aids and services include the provision of “qualified interpreters, notetakers, computer-aided transcription services, written materials, or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments.” 28 C.F.R. § 35.104.
- To determine “what type of auxiliary aid and service is necessary, a public entity shall give primary consideration to the requests of the individual with disabilities.” 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(b)(2).
- Deaf and hard of hearing people may not be charged for the costs of such auxiliary aids or services. 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(f).

II. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A. Statewide

The State of Ohio provides court services to a wide range of persons, including people who do not speak English and/or who are deaf or hard of hearing. Service providers include the Supreme Court of Ohio, the courts of appeals, and trial courts throughout the state.

According to the American Community Survey as released in October 2019 by the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of people over the age of five in Ohio who, at home, speak a language other than English is approximately 825,270.

The survey includes the following top 15 languages in Ohio:

<u>Language</u>	<u>No. of speakers over age of five</u>
1. Spanish	265,761
2. PA Dutch and other West Germanic	62,701
3. Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese)	46,828
4. German	42,942
5. Arabic	41,582
6. Nepali, Marathi or Other Indic	32,446
7. Somali, Amharic & Other Afro-Asiatic	28,994
8. French	27,884
9. Hindi	18,964
10. Telugu	17,908
11. Ukrainian and Other Slavic Languages	15,067
12. Russian	14,265

13. Vietnamese	14,223
14. Tagalog (Filipino)	14,153
15. Swahili	13,389

Correspondingly, data compiled by the Language Services Section on the use of telephonic interpreters in the state of Ohio from 2019-2020 revealed that the most widely used remote languages used in courts statewide are the following:

<u>Language</u>	<u>2019-2020 Avg.</u>
1. Spanish	1,828
2. Nepali	332
3. Arabic	270
4. French	209
5. Swahili	209
6. Somali	184
7. Kinyarwanda	103
8. Mandarin	101
9. Russian	69
10. Vietnamese	55
11. Burmese	35
12. Tigrinya	35
13. Amharic	30
14. Punjabi	25
15. Korean	20

B. Montgomery County Common Pleas Court, General Division

The Montgomery County Common Pleas Court, General Division will make every effort to provide services to all LEP and deaf or hard of hearing persons in its jurisdiction. The most commonly used languages in the Court are Spanish, Russian, and Mandarin.

Additionally, a survey conducted in 2010 by the Supreme Court of Ohio Language Services Program revealed that the most widely used languages in courts statewide are, in order, the following:

1. Spanish
2. American Sign Language
3. Somali
4. Russian
5. Arabic
6. French
7. Mandarin
8. Korean
9. Cambodian
10. Amharic

III. LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

A. Language Access Coordinator

The Court has designated the Language Access Coordinator to be the Case Management, who reports to the Director of the Case Management Department, and who, in turn, reports to the Court Administrator. The Language Access Coordinator, along with Director of Case Management and the Administrative Judge, will assist in ensuring that language services are delivered by the court in accordance with this plan and the Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio, Rules 80 - 89.

The Court's Language Access Coordinator is Leslie Keplinger. Ms. Keplinger can be reached at (937) 225-5513. Complaints submitted under Section VIII of this Language Access Plan will be addressed by the Language Access Coordinator within three business days. In addition to the responsibilities already outlined in this plan, the Language Access Coordinator also has the following responsibilities:

- Identify qualified interpreters and translators to be included in an interpreter database or list are maintained by the court;
- Track and collect data regarding the use of interpreters, the languages needed, etc.;
- Review annually and update the court's Policy and Procedures Manual for Interpreter Services;
- Outline measures to ensure quality control of interpreters and translators;
- Assign qualified interpreters and translators perform language assistance functions.

B. Interpreters Used in the Courts

Under Ohio law and Supreme Court rules, there are two different instances in which a court must provide an interpreter: in a case or court function and in connection with ancillary services. This distinction is important because the type of interpreter to be provided and the court's responsibilities differ depending on the specific situation.

By statute, Ohio courts must appoint qualified interpreters. Specifically, section 2311.14 of the Ohio Revised Code provides that courts shall provide interpreters due to hearing, speech, or other impairments of a party or a witness to a case.

Additionally, pursuant to R.C. 2930.041 (Marsy's Law), the court will provide a Supreme Court certified foreign language interpreter, Supreme Court registered, Supreme Court provisionally qualified, or language-skilled interpreter in all legal proceedings for a limited English proficient victim at no cost to the victim.

Similarly, the court will provide a Supreme Court certified sign language interpreter, a Supreme Court registered sign language interpreter, a Supreme Court Sup.R. 88(E)(3) eligible sign language interpreter, or a certified American Sign Language interpreter from the Registry for Interpreters of the Deaf, in all legal proceedings for a deaf or hard of hearing victim at no cost to the victim

Additionally, Rule 88 of the Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio requires that the Court appoint an interpreter in a case or court function when a LEP or deaf or hard of hearing individual requests an interpreter or when the court determines the services of an interpreter are necessary for the meaningful participation of a party or a witness.

Under Ohio law, foreign language interpreters will be provided at the court's expense if the party is found to be indigent. However, in order to comply with the prohibition against national origin discrimination in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d, et. seq., the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, 42 U.S.C. 3789d(c), and 28 C.F.R. Part 42, Subparts C and D, recipients of federal funds must provide meaningful access to limited English proficient (LEP) individuals. *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974). The U.S. Department of Justice advises that practices, such as charging for interpretation and translation services or seeking recoupment for those costs, significantly impair, restrict, or preclude the participation of LEP individuals in the judicial system and are inconsistent with recipients' Title VI obligations. For more information, please refer to Guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice to state court justices and administrators' letter from Assistant Attorney of the Civil Rights Division to Chief Justices and State Court Administrators (Aug. 16, 2010); Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons, 67 Fed. Reg. 41455 (June 18, 2002).

In the Court, sign language interpreters will be provided at the court's expense for all deaf or hard of hearing court parties, witnesses, alleged victims, or jurors in compliance with the ADA.

IV. USE OF INTERPRETERS

A. Determining the Need for an Interpreter

There are various ways that the Court will determine whether an LEP or deaf or hard of hearing person needs the services of a court interpreter. First, the LEP or deaf or hard of hearing person may request an interpreter.

Second, court personnel and judges may determine that an interpreter is necessary for the meaningful participation of a party or witness. Many people who need an interpreter will not request one. Because they do not realize that interpreters are available or recognize the level of English proficiency or communication skills needed to understand the court proceeding, they mistakenly think they will have to pay for the interpreter. Therefore, when it appears that an individual has any difficulty communicating, the court must provide an interpreter to ensure full access to the court. See Sup. R. 88(A)(2), (B)(1)(b). In legal proceedings, the court must determine, on the record, as to the need for an interpreter. In court functions and ancillary services, designated staff may determine the need of an interpreter.

Third, once a party or a witness has been identified as a LEP, deaf or hard of hearing individual, the court will exercise every effort to appoint interpreters in all future related proceedings or court functions. Furthermore, the court will follow the requirements of Sup. R. 88 to appoint an interpreter (see Section C below). If no in-person interpreter is available at the given instance, the court will grant a continuance or if possible and appropriate, in accordance with Sup. R. 88, Appendix J, use the services of a telephonic interpreter.

B. Court Interpreter Qualifications

The Language Services Program of the Supreme Court of Ohio maintains a statewide roster of interpreters who may work in the courts. The interpreter roster can be accessed at www.sc.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvc/certification/rosters/default.asp. Foreign language interpreters on the roster have passed a written examination, attended at least 24 hours of court interpreter training, and have scored within a designated range that measures their language and interpreting skill. Sign language interpreters have also met similar requirements as necessary for national certification through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. The definition of each category of interpreter is set forth in [Sup. R. 80-88](#).

C. Appointment of a Court Interpreter

The Court will appoint in-person and telephonic court interpreters in accordance with all criteria set forth in Sup. R. 88 and will ensure that certified court interpreters are used whenever reasonably available.

Pursuant to Sup. R. 88(C), the Court will make all reasonable efforts to avoid appointing foreign language interpreters or sign language interpreters if they are compensated by a business owned or controlled by a party or a witness; friend or a family or household member of a party or witness; a potential witness; court personnel employed for a purpose other than interpreting; law enforcement officer or probation department personnel; or would not serve to protect a party's rights or ensure the integrity of the proceedings or have a conflict of interest, real or perceived.

D. Language Services outside the Courtroom

In accordance with Sup. R. 89, the Court shall ensure that LEP individuals and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing have meaningful access to ancillary services outside the courtroom. LEP individuals and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing may come in contact with court personnel via the phone, counter, or other means. The Court has the following resources to assist LEP individuals and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- When a court staff member does not know what language a customer is speaking, they use an "I Speak" card which is available in 63 languages. The Language Access Coordinator is responsible for distributing cards to all staff and to any new staff.
- In order to meet the needs of those who speak less-common languages, court staff may rely on telephonic interpretation or relay services to bridge communication.

V. TRANSLATED FORMS AND DOCUMENTS

Ohio courts understand the importance of translating forms and documents so that LEP individuals have greater access to the courts' services.

The Court currently does not have forms translated into commonly used languages.

When interpreters are hired for hearings, interpreters are expected to provide sight translations for corresponding documentation to LEP individuals.

The Court follows the process to translate material described in Appendix J of the *Interpreters in the Judicial System: A Handbook for Ohio Judges*. Appendix J identifies the steps to translate material from project management to editing, proofreading, and publishing. The section also describes the process for the selection of qualified translators. The Court will also rely on the Language Services Program at the Supreme Court of Ohio for consultation and technical assistance.

The Court will assess demographics and analyze the most commonly used forms and embark in the translation of additional forms as resources allow.

VI. LOCAL RULE

The Court has adopted Mont. Co. C.P.R. 12.02 regarding the appointment of interpreters.

VII. TRAINING

Ohio courts are committed to providing language access training opportunities for all staff members who come in contact with or may come in contact with LEP individuals and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Ohio Judicial College and the Language Services Program provide on-going training for court staff regarding issues related to LEP populations, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, the use of interpreters, and other language access matters.

The Court staff that have direct contact with LEP individuals or individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing will receive training on language access, to be coordinated by the Director of Case Management. The Director of Case Management will ensure that all staff receives updated trainings on a regular basis and that all new staff are trained at the time of hire.

VIII. COMPLAINT PROCESS

The Court will ensure that all LEP individuals and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing receive language assistance services in their primary language. To promptly address any concerns that an LEP person or an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing did not receive language assistance, the Supreme Court of Ohio has developed a process for handling such complaints. For more information on the complaint resolution process please visit:

<http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvcs/default.asp>.

Parties may also call 1(888)-317-3177, Monday-Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM, or send correspondence via email to: InterpreterServices@sc.ohio.gov or via US Postal Service to:

Language Services Program
Complaint Resolution
65 South Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

The Court's employees will also provide information on this complaint process to LEP individuals or individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing upon request or if an LEP/deaf or hard of hearing individual voices concern about the lack of language access services or the quality of services that were provided.

In addition to the Supreme Court's complaint process, the Court has developed a local complaint resolution process as well. If the Language Access Coordinator receives a language access complaint, the Coordinator will document receipt of the complaint and provide information about it to the Director of Case Management. Once the Director of Case Management receives notice of a language access complaint, the Director will take prompt action to review, investigate and respond to its allegations. The Language Access Coordinator will also notify the Supreme Court of Ohio Manager of the Language Services Section of such complaint.

The Court displays a sign translated into Ohio's 12 most frequently used languages which states:

If you need an interpreter, please contact Leslie Keplinger at 937.225.5513

You may have the right to a court-appointed interpreter. If one is not provided, call 1.888.317.3177, Monday - Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM.

This sign is displayed at a common area visible to all court users. In the Court, the Language Access Coordinator is responsible to make sure signs are visible, interpreters are provided, and our LAP plan is monitored.

IX. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF LAP

A. LAP Approval

The Court's LAP has been approved by the Administrative Judge of the court. Any future revisions to the plan will be submitted to the Administrative Judge for approval. The Court's LAP will be made available on the court's website and employee portal for all court employees who may have direct contact with LEP individuals or deaf or hard of hearing individuals to access.

B. Notification

The Court's Human Resource Specialist will ensure that any new staff is informed of how to access a copy of the plan. Copies of Court's LAP will be provided to the public upon request. In addition, the Court will post this plan on its website for public viewing.

C. Evaluation of the LAP

The Director of Case Management or designee will review this plan on an annual basis and make changes based on the review. The evaluation will include review of any complaints received, identification of any problem areas, development of required corrective action strategies, and input from court staff. Elements of the evaluation may include:

- Assessing the number of LEP/deaf hard of hearing persons requesting court interpreters in Ohio courts;
- Assessing current language needs to determine if additional services or translated materials should be provided;
- Assessing whether staff members adequately understand LEP policies and procedures and how to carry them out;
- Reviewing complaints received since the last review; and
- Gathering feedback from LEP/deaf hard of hearing communities around the state; using that feedback as collaboration on any revisions to the LAP.

Any revisions made to the plan will be approved by the Administrative Judge and will be communicated by posting on the Court's public website.

X. OFFICIAL DESIGNATION OF LANGUAGE ACCESS COORDINATOR AND BACK-UP LANGUAGE ACCESS COORDINATOR.

Language Access Coordinator

Name: Leslie Keplinger

Title: Case Management Supervisor

Address: 41 N. Perry Street, Rm. 103

City, State, Zip: Dayton, Ohio 45422

Phone: (937) 225-5513

Email: Leslie.Keplinger@montcourt.oh.gov

In the event that the Language Access Coordinator is unavailable, the back-up Language Access Coordinator will serve as the substitute.

Back-up Language Access Coordinator

Name: Candace Anderson

Title: Director of Case Management
Address: 41 N. Perry Street, Rm. 103
City, State, Zip: Dayton, Ohio 45422
Phone: (937) 225-6000
Email: candace.anderson@montcourt.oh.gov

XI. HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Federal interagency website about language access- www.lep.gov
- American Bar Association Standards for Language Access in Courts, February 2012, available at www.americanbar.org
- Department of Justice Language Access Planning and Technical Assistance Tool for Courts, February 2014, available at www.lep.gov
- Supreme Court of Ohio's Interpreter Services Program, <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvcs/>

XII. LAP APPROVAL

This LAP was reviewed and approved by the Judges of the Montgomery County Common Pleas Court, General Division.