



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

Public Information Office

Breaking Down the Language Barrier

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts operates a program to provide qualified foreign language interpreters and sign language interpreters for people involved in legal proceedings in the Pennsylvania courts.

The courts are confronted with people who speak many languages, the most common being Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, Arabic and sign language. Interpreters are called upon thousands of times a year to assist these individuals during legal proceedings.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which administers the Pennsylvania court system, directed in 2004 that an Interpreter Certification Program be established to train, test and certify court interpreters, and to require mandatory continuing education for them.

The goal is to ensure that uniform statewide training standards for court interpreters are in place and that qualified interpreters are available in all counties.

The interpreters program maintains a master list of certified interpreters that is available to judges, lawyers and the public. Most interpreters are independent contractors. A small number are directly employed by the courts.

In criminal matters, domestic abuse cases, support cases and contempt of court cases, the counties pay the cost of interpreter services. In most civil cases, the parties—plaintiff or defendant—pay the costs.

To be certified, language interpreters are required to participate in a two-day orientation workshop and to take and pass written and oral examinations. They are required to speak English fluently, to be fluent in one or more foreign languages, to be familiar with court procedures and legal terminology and to be trained in ethics.

The certification program is based on a model established by the National Center for State Courts' Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification. Information about Pennsylvania's Interpreter Certification Program is available at:

<http://www.pacourts.us/T/AOPC/CourtInterpreterProg/default.htm>