



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

## News for Immediate Release

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# Supreme Court approves language access plan for courts

**HARRISBURG** — The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania has adopted a comprehensive plan to improve access to justice for those with limited English proficiency and those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Language Access Plan is designed to guide the judiciary in meeting language challenges brought by the growing diversity of Pennsylvania's population. It also further solidifies the courts' commitment to fair and equal access to justice by providing quality language access services to non-English-speaking and deaf court users.

Pennsylvania is the 10th most linguistically diverse state in the country. Approximately 10 percent of the Commonwealth's residents speak another language at home. Spanish is the language for which interpreters are most frequently requested in our courts, with American Sign Language at number two, followed by Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese and Arabic.

The Language Access Plan marks the latest effort by Pennsylvania's Unified Judicial System to create solutions to language barriers in the state court system.

The AOPC developed a language access plan template for judicial districts in 2014 to identify existing and develop future language-related services and resources at the local level for judges, court staff, attorneys and the general public. The plans were implemented in March 2015, and each judicial district designated a language access coordinator to oversee the availability of services in its [courts](#).

In addition, the AOPC's Interpreter Certification Program has steadily increased the number of certified and qualified interpreters statewide since its inception in 2008. Currently, more than 200 certified and qualified interpreters are on the program's roster, representing more than 30 languages. More than 1,400 candidates are currently attempting to become certified.

With the governor's support, the state legislature appropriated \$1.5 million in 2016 to help counties defray the cost of complying with language access. In 2016 courts spent \$3.2 million in providing interpreter and related language access services.

A Language Access Advisory Group was created 18 months ago by the Supreme Court to develop the statewide plan for the court system. The advisory group included judges, court administrators, court interpreters, legal services providers, and elected government leaders.

The statewide plan provides for increased language access training and data collection procedures for the Commonwealth's 60 judicial districts.

Pennsylvania already has statewide criminal protective orders, protection from abuse, and protection against sexual violence and intimidation forms translated into multiple languages.

The plan encourages judicial districts to increase the availability of translated local court forms and signage.

Methods for identifying the need for language services at the earliest possible point in the judicial process and the development of a procedure to monitor language access complaints are other elements in the 49-page plan.

The plan can be viewed and downloaded on the state court system website:

<http://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs/interpreter-program>

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**EDITORS' NOTE** – *Members of the advisory committee from each region of the state are available to talk with reporters about how language access issues are affecting their courts – what challenges they see and how they address them. If you'd like to talk with someone from your region, please call Art Heinz who will help you reach the appropriate person.*



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