



PRESS RELEASE

New York State
Unified Court System

Hon. Lawrence K. Marks
Chief Administrative Judge

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Date: March 24, 2017

Chief Administrative Judge Unveils Comprehensive Plan To Help Ensure Language Access in the New York Courts

New York – Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks today announced a strategic plan that aims to enhance access to justice for litigants and other parties with limited English proficiency (LEP) or who are deaf or hard of hearing. Building on the success of action plans launched in 2006 and 2011 to improve the quality of language access services in the New York courts, *Ensuring Language Access: A Strategic Plan for the New York State Courts* comprises nearly 70 concrete actions to be taken by the court system in eliminating barriers to justice for LEP and deaf or hard-of-hearing court users.

The multitude of languages spoken in New York – over 150 – combined with the State’s geographical diversity, make the task of providing effective interpreting services in the New York courts a daunting one. The task is further complicated by the New York courts’ policy of providing interpreting services in cases of all types, to the broadest range of court users.

Among other areas, the strategic plan unveiled today focuses on enhancing court interpreter recruitment, training and assessment; optimizing the use of interpreting resources; ensuring language access in other parts of the courthouse in addition to the courtroom; more effectively responding to the diverse needs of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community; raising public awareness about the services provided by the courts’ Office of Language Access; and ensuring language access in New York’s Town and Village Courts. Key steps include:

- Creating a court interpreter trainee position to establish an entry-level gateway to a court interpreting career.

- Raising the rates for per diem court interpreters, and implementing a tiered compensation structure based on experience, education and other factors to attract the most qualified per diem interpreters.
- Establishing a court interpreting intern program to give college students an opportunity to learn about the court system and careers in court interpreting.
- Expanding testing for court interpreters. The court system requires all court interpreters to pass a written English Proficiency Examination. In addition, the court system has developed oral exams in 22 languages that account for more than 80 percent of the requested language needs. Oral exams will be developed in seven additional languages, based on usage and demand.
- Replacing the annual, in-person written English exam with an exam that can be taken at any time.
- Increasing the use of bilingual orders of protection. The court system currently issues bilingual orders of protection in Spanish, Russian and Chinese in all Family Courts and Integrated Domestic Violence Courts statewide, and recently initiated bilingual orders of protection in criminal courts. The court system will be adding more languages on an ongoing basis and will assess the feasibility of expanding the bilingual format to other types of orders, such as child support.
- Establishing protocols by which attorneys and other justice partners can notify the court, at the earliest possible point, that an individual requires language access assistance.
- Improving protocols and systems for sharing interpreters between the courts.
- Expanding the use of remote interpreting in court proceedings. Remote interpreting helps avoid adjournments and delays, especially where considerable travel time would be required for an in-person appearance by the interpreter. Last year, it was provided in 55 languages, for more than 600 cases.
- Identifying critical points of contact with the public in each courthouse and establishing protocols to ensure language access at each point.
- Ensuring that state-of-the-art assistive listening technology is available in every courthouse.
- Appointing a task force to develop a plan to improve language access in the Justice Courts, which operate in towns and villages in the 57 counties outside New York City and hear more than two million cases each year. While constitutionally part of the Unified Court System, Justice Courts are locally financed, many lacking the funds to hire per diem interpreters.

“The New York State Judiciary is committed, above all else, to the dual goals of unfettered access to the courts and equal justice under the law. In a state as diverse as New York,

that commitment is continuously tested by the hurdles presented by language differences and hearing loss. While much has been accomplished in recent years to improve language access in our courthouses, the program announced today will help move us further along the path to equal justice for all New Yorkers. I am grateful to our Advisory Committee on Language Access, co-chaired by Fern Schair and Eric Brettschneider, for its vital role in improving language access in the New York courts and helping to shape the road map ahead,” said Chief Administrative Judge Marks.

The full strategic plan is available online at:

www.nycourts.gov/publications/language-access-report2017.pdf

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