

Seventh Judicial Circuit Language Access Plan

I. Legal Basis and Purpose

This document serves as the plan for the Seventh Judicial Circuit, Unified Judicial System of the State of South Dakota to ensure access to court services for persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) and deaf/hard of hearing persons. It is designed to respond to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act and to the requirements imposed by Executive Order 13166, South Dakota state law and related guidance. This plan provides a framework for the provision of timely and effective language assistance to persons with LEP who come in contact with the courts of the Seventh Judicial Circuit.

Section 601 of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 USC Section 2000d et. seq. provides that “No person in the United States shall on the ground of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Executive Order 13166 requires all agencies receiving federal funds to address the needs of persons who, due to LEP, cannot fully and equally participate in the agency’s programs without language assistance.

The US Department of Justice (USDOJ) has issued policy guidance on the responsibility of courts under this order to provide interpreting and translating services. The USDOJ has the right to investigate complaints against any agency that does not provide free languages services when necessary to participate in the program.

II. Needs Assessment

The Seventh Judicial Circuit Court makes and will continue to make every effort to provide services to all persons with LEP.

In the Seventh Judicial Circuit, Spanish interpreters were most frequently needed, however interpreter needs will vary based on particular needs of individuals involved in court proceedings. The Seventh Judicial Circuit Court currently determines those particular needs and provides interpreter services on a case by case basis in accordance with all applicable laws, and will continue to do so in compliance with any policies, rules or laws established that may pertain to provision of interpreter services.

III. Language Assistance Resources

A. Determining the Need for an Interpreter in the Courtroom

“When a witness cannot communicate or understand the English language the court shall procure and appoint a disinterested interpreter or translator for him. . . .” SDCL 19-3-7. It is at the Court’s discretion to make the determination when an interpreter is necessary. Among the factors

taken into consideration by the court are whether a party or person whose presence is necessary or appropriate in a court proceeding:

1. Is unable to accurately describe persons, places and events related to the proceeding due to a non-English speaking background or hearing impairment;
2. Is unable to tell the court "what happened" over a period of time;
3. Is unable to request clarification when statements are vague or misleading, to defend or advocate a position, or otherwise meaningfully participate in a proceeding;
4. Is not on equal footing with an English speaking person with an equivalent education or background;
5. Is unable to speak or understand English and translation is necessary to allow for effective participation in a proceeding.

See Supreme Court's Committee to Study the Use of Interpreters and Translators in the South Dakota Court System, 2011 Report to the South Dakota Supreme Court, November 18, 2011, p.23 - 24.

The Court further determines who qualifies for an interpreter by undertaking the following analysis:

An individual who cannot speak English, or cannot otherwise understand a communication in English, qualifies for appointment of an interpreter if:

1. The individual is a party to a proceeding;
2. The individual's presence is necessary or desirable in a proceeding (i.e. the parent of a juvenile involved in a proceeding);
3. The individual is a person that would be directly affected by any action or decision in the proceeding;
4. The individual is a witness in a proceeding.

Id. at 24.

B. Providing Interpreters in the Courtroom

The Seventh Circuit Court Administrative Office maintains a continually updated list of interpreters who may be contacted when the Court determines that an interpreter is necessary. The list includes Spanish, Arabic, Cantonese, Dutch, Filipino, Romanian, German, Japanese, Lakota, Mandarin, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, and Vietnamese interpreters. In addition, an interpreter from Communication Services for the Deaf is referenced.

In situations where an interpreter of a language not listed in needed, Circuit Court Administration will consult with outside sources such as Lutheran Social Services in Sioux Falls, or other circuits within the state to locate the needed interpreter. Administration consults with Ellsworth Air Force Base in some instances, as the Base sometimes has interpreters to fit the court's needs. Qualifications of the interpreters are scrutinized by the Presiding Judge and Court Administrator to determine whether the interpreter will fit the court's needs. Considerations taken in scrutinizing potential interpreters' qualifications include:

1. What is the interpreter's native language and if language services needed is not the native language of the interpreter, the length of time speaking the language;
2. What formal schooling relating to the language and interpretation services was completed;
3. What certifications the interpreter possesses;
4. What level of experience he/she possess in interpretation services.

While this is the current procedure, the Seventh Judicial Circuit Court is willing to implement any policies, rules or laws to determine minimum qualifications of interpreters that may be established within the UJS or South Dakota Legislature.

The Seventh Circuit is committed to providing access to interpreters at no cost to a witness or party. South Dakota law provides that if a witness or party requires an interpreter or translator, one will be provided at no cost to the witness or party.

IV. Training and Evaluation

The Seventh Judicial Circuit Court is committed to providing language access training opportunities for all judicial officers and staff members. While training currently is conducted in an informal manner throughout the circuit, additional policies, rules and laws established will be implemented to further training and learning opportunities as they pertain to interpreter services.

The Seventh Judicial Circuit Court will routinely assess whether changes to the LAP are needed or mandated by policy, rule or law. Then plan may be changed or updated at any time but reviewed not less frequently than once a year. Each year the Court Administrator, in consultation with the Presiding Judge, will review the effectiveness of the court's LAP and update as necessary. The evaluation will include identification of any problem areas and development of corrective action strategies. Elements of the evaluation will include:

1. Number of LEP services requested;
2. Assessment of current language needs to determine if additional services or translated materials should be provided;
3. Review of feedback from court employee training sessions; and
4. Customer satisfaction feedback.

V. LAP Effective Date:

July 1, 2021

VI: Approval

Approved by:



Craig A. Pfeifle
Presiding Judge
Seventh Judicial Circuit

Date: 24 NOV 21



Kristi W. Erdman
Court Administrator
Seventh Judicial Circuit

Date: 11/23/21