

Language Assistance Plan

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Legal Basis and Purpose

This document serves as the plan for Tarrant County Criminal Courts to provide to persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services that are in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq.; 45 C.F.R. § 80.1 et seq.; and 28 C.F.R. § 42.101–42.112) 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 Tarrant County Criminal Courts.

This Language Assistance Plan was developed to ensure meaningful access to court services for persons with limited English proficiency. Although court interpreters are provided for persons with a hearing loss, access services for them are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act rather than Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and therefore will not be addressed in this plan.

I. Identification of LEP persons

The 2010 Census estimates that 26% of Tarrant County residents speak Spanish as their primary language. This information is based on data collected from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The 2007-2011 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimates) indicates that in Tarrant County if a language other than English is spoken at home, then 12.3% (200,973) of that population speaks English less than “very well.” Out of that 12.3%, 9.8% are Spanish speakers (160,713), .6% speak other Indo-European languages, 1.6% speak Asian and Pacific Islander languages, and .3% speak other languages.

II. Language Assistance Measures

A. Interpreters Used in the Courtroom

1. Providing Interpreters in the Courtroom

Tarrant County intends to take reasonable steps to provide Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals with spoken-language interpreters in court proceedings in accordance with both state and federal policies.

For litigants and witnesses in criminal hearings, the court is mandated by federal law to provide interpreters and will do so at no cost to court users.

For litigants and witnesses in all other court proceedings, the court is mandated by federal law to provide interpreters and will do so at no cost to court users.

2. Determining the Need for an Interpreter in the Courtroom

Tarrant County may determine the need for an interpreter for a court hearing in various ways.

The need for a court interpreter may be identified prior to a court proceeding by the LEP individual or by anyone acting, with permission, on his or her behalf.

The need for an interpreter also may be made known in the courtroom at the time of the proceeding. To the extent possible, advance notice of the need for an interpreter should be given to the court and all parties.

Also, the judge may determine that it is appropriate to provide an interpreter for a court matter.

3. Court Interpreter Qualifications

Tarrant County contracts interpreters for courtroom hearings in compliance with the rules and policies set forth by Chapter 57 of the Texas Government Code. The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation maintains a statewide roster of licensed interpreters who may work in the courts. This roster is available to court staff and the public on the Internet at www.license.state.tx.us/licensesearch. For hearings where the court is not required to utilize a Texas licensed court interpreter, the Courts may utilize telephonic interpreting services where appropriate.

4. Requesting an Interpreter

Tarrant County court coordinators will serve as the primary point of contact for all LEP court services. All courthouse staff will be trained to direct anyone inquiring about LEP services to that office.

Litigants, witnesses or attorneys who have a need for an interpreter will contact the court coordinator as soon as reasonably possible to request an interpreter for a courtroom proceeding. Every effort will be made to ensure the presence of an interpreter for the proceeding as requested. If an interpreter is not available for the proceeding and telephonic interpreting services are not appropriate, the courtroom proceeding will be delayed until an interpreter is available.

B. Language Services Outside of the Courtroom

Tarrant County will take reasonable steps to ensure that LEP individuals have meaningful access to services outside the courtroom. This is perhaps the most challenging situation facing court staff, because in most situations they are charged with assisting LEP individuals without an interpreter present. LEP individuals may come in contact with court personnel via the phone, the public counter, or other means.

The most common points of service outside the courtroom are at the court's public counters and entrances. Bilingual assistance is provided at the public counter by the placement of bilingual staff as is practical. The court also periodically calls on other bilingual staff from elsewhere in the court to assist at a public counter.

Providing language services outside the courtroom entails both daily communications and interactions between court staff and LEP individuals to provide accessibility of court services.

To facilitate communication between LEP individuals and court staff, Tarrant County will use the following resources to the degree that resources are available:

- Court interpreters, to the extent permitted under the active memorandum of understanding or independent interpreter contract;
- Bilingual employees;
- Bilingual volunteers;
- "I Speak" cards, to identify the individual's primary language;
- Written information in Spanish on how to access and navigate the court;

C. Translated Forms and Documents

Tarrant County understands the importance of translating forms and documents so that LEP individuals have greater access to the courts' services.

Interpreters at court hearings are expected to provide sight translations of court documents and correspondence associated with the case.

III. Court Staff and Volunteer Recruitment

A. Bilingual Staff for Language Access

- The Tarrant County is an equal opportunity employer and often hires bilingual staff to serve its LEP individuals.
- Bilingual staff is on call to assist with contacts from LEP individuals, as needed.

B. Volunteers for Language Access

The court may also use volunteers to assist with language access in the following areas:

- At public counters to provide interpretive services between staff and LEP individuals; and
- To serve as interpreter trainees by helping LEP individuals in areas outside of the courtroom, to develop skills in preparation for the certified interpreter examination

IV. Training Staff

Tarrant County is committed to providing LEP training opportunities for all judicial officers and staff members. Training and learning opportunities currently offered by the Tarrant County will be expanded or continued as needed. Those opportunities may include:

- Cultural competency training;
- LEP plan training;
- Staff attendance in Spanish training, provided by the court in partnership with local colleges and institutions to offer these classes on site and free to employees on court time, or through tuition reimbursement;
- New employee orientation training; and,
- Judicial officer orientation on the use of court interpreters and language competency

V. Providing Notice to LEP Persons

To communicate with the court's LEP individuals on various legal issues of importance to the community and to make them aware of services available to all language speakers, Tarrant County will provide community outreach and education and seek input from its LEP individuals to further improve services. Outreach and education efforts may include:

- Partnerships and collaborations with community organizations. The court will solicit input from the LEP community and its representatives and will seek to inform community service organizations on how LEP individuals can access court services

VI. Monitoring and Updating the LAP

Tarrant County will routinely assess whether changes to the LEP Plan are needed. The plan will remain in effect unless modified or updated.

Tarrant County will review the effectiveness of the LEP Plan periodically and update it as necessary. The evaluation may include identification of any problem areas and development of corrective action strategies. Elements of the evaluation may include:

- Number of LEP individuals requesting court interpreters or language assistance and funding provided;
- Assessment of current language needs to determine if additional services or translated materials should be provided;
- Solicitation and review of feedback from LEP communities within the county;
- Assessment of whether court staff adequately understand LEP policies and procedures and how to carry them out;
- Review of feedback from court employee training sessions; and,