



Ensuring Language Access in the Courts

The Civil Rights Division collaborates with state and local courts and stakeholders across the country to further the shared goal of equal access to the courts, regardless of English proficiency, and to ensure the integrity and fairness of the legal system for all.

Recent examples of our work

The Civil Rights Division has worked with state and local court systems in more than 20 states across the country to remove language barriers for people who are limited English proficient and to ensure compliance with Title VI.

- Most recently, these court systems include:
 - [Fort Bend County, Texas](#)
 - [Oklahoma](#)
 - [Louisiana](#)
 - [North Carolina](#)
 - [South Dakota](#)
 - [Vermont](#)

You can find information about these matters and many other resources at www.lep.gov/state-courts

“No one should encounter barriers to courts because of the language they speak.”

-- Kristen Clarke, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights

Federal Civil Rights Protections

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its regulations prohibit race, color, and national origin discrimination against any person in the United States by a program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. 42 U.S.C. § 2000d; 28 C.F.R. Part 42 Subsection C.

To meet their obligations, state court recipients of federal funds must, for instance, provide appropriate language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP). Such assistance includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that court users with LEP have adequate interpretation and translation services provided at no cost during hearings and trials, as well as in court operations.

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To report discrimination to the Civil Rights Division, visit civilrights.justice.gov.



U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

civilrights.justice.gov

Civil Rights Division Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act

- The Civil Rights Division investigates reports of failure to provide adequate language services in violation of Title VI and works to secure voluntary compliance.
- Through our agreements and technical assistance, courts and court systems have expanded language services by:
 - Developing and/or updating statewide language access plans to provide greater services to court users.
 - Providing oral and written language assistance services at no cost in all civil and criminal cases and court operations regardless of indigency status.
 - Creating and distributing in courtrooms, clerk's offices, and courthouses in-language notices on the provision of free language services.
 - Creating and issuing video remote and telephonic interpreter guidance for court staff and judges.
 - Creating and providing language access training for court staff and judges.
 - Maintaining public facing websites explaining, in English and non-English languages, how to request interpretation or translation services.
 - Developing a language access complaint process.
 - Translating court documents and court forms into multiple languages and making those documents publicly available.
 - Improving case management systems to better track language needs.

Additional Resources: Many state courts and state and national organizations have taken proactive steps to improve access to justice for court users with LEP. For example, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Court Consulting Services Division, Language Access Services Section provides state courts with resources to overcome language barriers in the courts and to ensure that providing individuals with LEP equal access to the courts is a core court function. NCSC also hosts a website and consulting services designed to benefit state courts, prospective interpreters, and anyone interested in how state courts meet the needs of, and continuously seek to improve services to, individuals with LEP. For more information, please visit <https://www.ncsc.org/consulting-and-research/areas-of-expertise/language-access>.

In addition, stakeholders including the [American Bar Association](#), the [National Language Access Advocates Network](#), interpreter and translator organizations, and others have created resources and taken action to improve language access in the courts.