



PROGRAM & PROJECT QUICK LOOK

NEBRASKA JUDICIAL BRANCH LANGUAGE ACCESS PROGRAM

A trusted, collaborative, and respected catalyst for and provider of professional language interpreters and translators in Nebraska State Courts and Probation Services, ensuring the public's constitutional right of equal access to justice regardless of the language spoken.

ORIGIN & AUTHORIZATION

- Nebraska Revised Statutes §§25-2401 to 25-2407 (Interpreters in Court Proceedings)
- Nebraska Revised Statutes §§20-150 to 20-159 (Interpreters for Deaf and Hard of Hearing)
- Nebraska Court Rules §§ 6-701 et seq. (Rules on Interpreters in Courts)

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

It is the declared policy of the State that the constitutional rights of persons unable to communicate the English language cannot be fully protected unless interpreters are available to assist such persons in legal proceedings. The Language Access Program recruits, tests, and certifies court interpreters and coordinates the appointment of qualified interpreters across the state to facilitate the communication of limited English proficient participants in the Nebraska Judicial Branch.

PRIORITIES

Provide high quality, efficient and cost effective language access across the state of Nebraska, regardless of the language spoken to limited English proficient court and probation users and provide information and support to judges, court staff, and probation staff.

- Identifying Limited English Proficient (LEP) Communities Who Need Assistance
 - Nebraska has the largest Limited English Population in the Midwest, 26.5% in 2016. With this sizable LEP population, Nebraska is second only to Minnesota in the Midwest in providing Language Access in its Judicial Branch.
 - In the 2018-19 academic year, the Nebraska Department of Education reported 23,340 English Learners. This is 7.16% of Nebraska's K-12 students, which is an increase from 6.20% in the 2014-15 academic year. Nebraska School Districts with the largest percentage of English Learners include South Sioux City (15%), Grand Island (16%), Omaha (17%), Lexington (37%), and Schuyler (37%).
- Meeting the Needs of LEP Individuals
 - In FY 2019, the Nebraska Judicial Branch provided court interpreters in 65 of Nebraska's 93 counties in which 96.9% of the State's population resides. Judicial Branch funded court interpreters provided language access across all 12 judicial districts.
 - In the event no Nebraska interpreter is available, Language Line on-demand telephone interpretation is utilized. During FY 2019 there were 1,469 calls to Language Line for interpretation of brief, non-evidentiary proceeding in 37 different languages. Language Line is used an average of 30.7 hours of interpretation per month in Spanish and languages less commonly spoken in Nebraska.
 - In FY 2019 Nebraska funded 24,596 instances of interpreter services via local interpreters and Language Line. While the greatest percentage of interpreter services continues to be provided in Spanish, 6 of Nebraska's 12 judicial districts used interpreter services in more than 10 languages.
 - The Language Access program continues to recruit, test and train court interpreters across the state. In those cases requiring an experienced interpreter of a language not commonly spoken in Nebraska, it is necessary to seek interpreter services from sources outside Nebraska. In FY 2019, the Nebraska Judicial Branch contracted with out of state interpreters speaking Czech, Greek, Hmong, K'iche', Mandarin, Marshallese, Mexican Sign, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Tagalog, and Telugu.

NEBRASKA JUDICIAL BRANCH PROGRAM & PROJECT QUICK LOOK

PRIORITIES CONTINUED

- Ongoing Plan for Language Access
 - Continued Commitment to Interpreter Education: A high value is placed on rigorous and active continuing education, with requirements codified in Court Rules and the Nebraska Code of Professional Responsibility for Court Interpreters. Our goal is to ensure that interpreters who serve in Nebraska state courts and probation offices meet the ethical principles of integrity and professionalism.
 - Enhancing timely, cost effective, and efficient access to interpreters through remote interpreting and block scheduling of certified Spanish court interpreters.

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Enhanced language access services provided to Office of Public Guardian, Juvenile Probation, and Problem Solving Courts. The Language Access Program continues to meet the growing demand for language access, although Nebraska's court qualified interpreter cadre remains small for such a large geographical area.
- Revised and improved Interpreter Orientation workshop implemented in Fall 2019.
- Forged a first of its kind in the nation collaborative interpreter recruitment, training, and testing partnership with Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Nebraska, Fall 2019, resulting in improved scores on the Interpreter Written Exam.
- Implementation of certified Spanish court interpreter block scheduling in 9th and 10th Judicial Districts, enhancing timely and cost effective language access in rural Nebraska courts.

LOOKING FORWARD

- Expanding Translation Services: Funds and qualified translators for additional translation of court and probation forms and materials into Spanish and other commonly spoken languages have not been identified at this time.
- Continuing recruitment, certification and development of court interpreters, particularly in languages other than Spanish, and enhancement of local interpreter skills.

CONTACTS

Jennifer A. Verhein

Statewide Language Access Coordinator
Court Services Division
Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation
Telephone 402.471.8854
jennifer.verhein@nebraska.gov

Amy E. Prenda

Deputy Administrator for Court Services
Court Services Division
Administrative Office of the Courts & Probation
Telephone 402.471.2921
amy.prenda@nebraska.gov

REFERENCES

Nebraska Judicial Branch Language Access Plan: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/language_portal/Nebraska%20Judicial%20Branch%20LAP_0.pdf

P.O. Box 98910
Lincoln, NE 68509-8910
402.471.3730
www.supremecourt.gov



STATE OF
NEBRASKA
JUDICIAL BRANCH

Administrative Office
of the Courts & Probation

Corey R. Steel, State Court Administrator | Deborah A. Minardi, State Probation Administrator