



## **COURT OF COMMON PLEAS OF PIKE COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA**

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# **LANGUAGE ACCESS PLAN**

2025

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## **Section 1: Introduction & Purpose.**

Equal access to the courts is fundamental to the legitimacy of the judicial system and critical to establish trust and confidence of Pennsylvanians in our courts. Access to language services is essential to ensure that those who are Limited English Proficient (“LEP”) or hearing-impaired (“HI”) can fully participate in judicial proceedings, services, programs, and other activities in which their rights and interests are implicated. We have an independent interest in the integrity of communication with LEP and HI clients to ensure both the protection of our laws and the fair dispensation of justice.

The policy of the Unified Judicial System (“UJS”) is to provide meaningful language access for all LEP and HI clients to provide due process and equal access to all judicial proceedings, services, programs, and activities. Our provision of meaningful language access shall be timely, accurate, and effective, at no cost to the client, including provision of American Sign Language (“ASL”) interpreters to clients, witnesses, and public spectators

Commonwealth policy regarding language access to the courts is embodied in the Language Access Plan for the Unified Judicial System (“LAP-UJS”)<sup>1</sup>. This plan was approved by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in March 2017, and the policies and requirements therein are binding on all judicial districts and incorporated herein by reference.

This judicial district has appointed a Language Access Coordinator (“LAC”) who can be reached via telephone at 570-296-3556 or via email at [lac@pikepa.org](mailto:lac@pikepa.org).

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## **Section 2: Legal Basis.**

The legal basis for our LAP is set forth in the LAP-UJS, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (at the federal level), and the Pennsylvania Interpreter Act and Regulations (at the state level).

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## **Section 3: General Principles of Language Access.**

The General Principles of Language Access are referenced in the LAP-UJS, and include the following:

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<sup>1</sup> The UJS Language Access Plan is available at: <http://languageaccess.pacourts.us>.

1. Courts are responsible for early identification of the need for language services, including, but not limited to, providing timely and effective notice to those in need of services;
2. Interpretation and translation must be provided by the Court at no cost;
3. Persons who request language services should be provided with them in accord with Title VI of the Civil Right Act and the Pennsylvania Interpreter Act;
4. Language services should be offered, even if not requested, where the need is apparent or where the ability of a person to understand and communicate in English is unclear;
5. LEP and HI clients should never be expected to use informal interpreters, such as family, opposing parties, or counsel, and courts should not allow their use;
6. Using in-person interpretation for judicial proceedings is the most effective method of ensuring proper communication for LEP-HI court participants and is strongly preferred under the law. Remote interpretation using audio-visual technology, including telephonic, is permitted in limited circumstances as indicated in the Pennsylvania Interpreter Act regulations;
7. Courts must provide interpreters in a timely manner; and
8. Courts must provide meaningful language access to LEP-HI participants for all services, programs, and court activities, including both civil and criminal court proceedings and the general business of courts.

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#### **Section 4: Language Needs of this Judicial District.**

Based on Language Access Data Collection information for 2023-2024, the top 5 languages (including American Sign Language) for which interpreters were most frequently requested in this judicial district were:

1	Spanish
2	Russian
3	Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese)
4	Polish
5	Burmese (1) & Gujarati (1)

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## **Section 5: Language Services & How to Use Them.**

- Oral Language Services.
  - **Interpreters.**
    - This judicial district provides interpreters for judicial proceedings in compliance with the rules and policies set forth in the Pennsylvania Interpreter Act & Regulations, the AOPC Interpreter Certification Program regulations,<sup>2</sup> and the Guidelines for the Procurement and Appointment of Interpreters issued by the AOPC<sup>3</sup>. These policies require this District to provide court interpreters to all LEP-HI parties, victims, witnesses, and certain other persons<sup>4</sup> for any civil or criminal proceeding.
    - This judicial district provides court users with the interpreter request and waiver forms available on the Interpreter Certification Program page of the UJS website.<sup>5</sup>
    - Interpreter request forms are provided on our Judicial District website: <https://court.pikepa.org/languageaccess.html>.
  - **Bilingual Staff.**
    - This Plan hereby incorporates by reference the Bilingual Employee Policy (“BEP”) issued by AOPC on September 28, 2018, and reissued as amended on December 20, 2018. The policy became effective on January 1, 2019.
    - Under the BEP, current employees of the UJS who are bilingual and intend to continue to use their bilingual skills to assist LEP-HI members of the public must be tested and achieve a passing score, as defined by the policy, by January 1, 2021. Employees hired after January 1, 2019, who intend to use their language skills to assist LEP-HI members of the public must be tested and achieve a passing score as defined by the policy before they can use their skills to assist members of the public.

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<sup>2</sup> 204 Pa. Code §221.

<sup>3</sup> See Also: Section V(A)(1), Language Services and How to Use Them/Oral Language Services/Interpreters at 10-13, and Section VIII(1) Qualification Requirements for Interpreters and Translators, at 33-35, respectively, of the LAP-UJS, which are hereby incorporated by reference.

<sup>4</sup> The District must provide an interpreter to deaf and hard of hearing court users whether parties to a case, witnesses, family members, or spectators. Interpreters are also provided to limited English proficient fiduciaries for a party; and a parent, guardian, or custodian of a minor or incapacitated person who is a party, victim, or witness.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs/interpreter-program>

- This judicial district has taken the following steps to implement the Bilingual Employee Policy:
  - We have not taken the listed actions, but intend to complete each step by the following dates:
    - Testing of bilingual employees will be incorporated into our hiring process by [insert date].
    - Bilingual employees will be informed that they will need to be tested by the judicial district and achieve a passing score as defined by the policy, or no longer use their bilingual skills as a part of their job by [insert date].
    - The above-referenced AOPC-produced training video will be viewed by bilingual employees and their supervisors by [insert date].
  - We do not have any bilingual employees and will therefore use in-person interpreters when available and telephonic interpretation in compliance with Section 104 of the Regulations pursuant to the Pennsylvania Interpreter Act.<sup>6</sup>

- Written Language Services.

- **Court Forms & Documents.**

- This Plan incorporates by reference the principles and translation protocols set forth in the AOPC Translation Policy & Procedures Manual of the United Judicial System.
    - This District has reviewed the UJS Translation Policy & Procedures Manual and follows the guidelines for high quality translation established therein.
    - This District uses the translated forms made available to the courts by the AOPC<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See: 204 Pa. Code 221, §104.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pacourts.us/forms/bilingual-forms>

- **Signage & Websites.**
  - While acknowledging that the counties in which judicial districts are located generally own the courthouse buildings and control signage, this district has taken the following steps to incorporate bilingual signage into its court buildings and address translation of court websites:
    - ☒ We have incorporated bilingual or multilingual signage into our existing court facilities as follows:
      - “I-speak” cards and “Right to Interpreter” posters are provided inside the Courthouse.
    - ☒ We have reviewed our court website with an eye to translating webpages in subject matter areas in which our judicial district experiences high LEP use.
- Use of Remote Technology.
  - ☒ The judicial district has contracted with *LanguageLine* to provide telephonic interpretation services, primarily for counter communication with LEP court users.<sup>8</sup>
  - ☒ Instructions for contacting a telephonic interpreter have been posted and distributed to all staff who interact with the public.
- Language Access to Services, Programs, and Activities Outside the Courtroom.
  - In addition to judicial proceedings, language access requirements apply to a wide range of services, programs, and activities outside the courtroom that are administered under, provided by, or contracted for under the authority of the court<sup>9</sup>.
  - Meaningful access to services outside the courtroom is a vital component of equal justice for LEP-HI clients. Examples include the following if administered under the authority of the court: domestic relations services, juvenile and adult probation services, *pro se* clinics, some Alternative Dispute Resolution (“ARD”) programs, family court, custody, education, and mediation programs, drug and alcohol evaluation and treatment programs, mental health evaluation and treatment programs, domestic violence programs, safe driving classes, anger management classes, and other diversionary and educational programs.

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<sup>8</sup> Judicial district employees have been trained in the appropriate use of telephonic interpretation and know best practice is to maintain only brief encounters at the counter rather than judicial proceedings, per Section 104 of the regulations pursuant to the Interpreter Act.

<sup>9</sup> See: Guidance on Services beyond the Courtroom provided to the judicial districts on March 14, 2019.

- Services provided by or contracted by this judicial district, and the methods through which language access is provided are listed below:

<b>Adult Probation</b>	• Contracted in-person Interpretation.
	• Telephonic Interpretation.
<b>Alternative Dispute Resolution</b>	• Contracted in-person Interpretation.
	• Telephonic Interpretation.
<b>Anger Management</b>	<i>Not provided or managed by the Court</i>
<b>Domestic Relations</b>	• Contracted in-person Interpretation.
	• Telephonic Interpretation.
<b>Domestic Violence Programs</b>	<i>Not provided or managed by the Court</i>
<b>Drug &amp; Alcohol Evaluation &amp; Treatment</b>	<i>Not provided or managed by the Court</i>
<b>Juvenile Probation</b>	• Contracted in-person Interpretation.
	• Telephonic Interpretation.
<b>Mental Health Evaluation &amp; Treatment</b>	<i>Not provided or managed by the Court</i>
<b>Safe Driving Classes</b>	<i>Not provided or managed by the Court</i>
<b>Other Programs &amp; Classes</b>	<i>Not provided or managed by the Court</i>

- In many judicial districts some court programs and services are provided by private third-party vendors contracted or paid by the court. Each District is responsible to ensure that meaningful access is provided to LEP-HI clients by vendors and should both seek out, review, and adjust contract terms accordingly.
  - This judicial district has not yet included language in vendor contracts requiring compliance with Title VI, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The district intends to accomplish this by this date: January 1, 2026.
  - The Language Access Coordinator for this District has advised judges to consider the ability of a LEP-HI litigant to complete a given program before

ordering him or her to participate therein, and not place a LEP-HI litigant in danger of being held in contempt, charged extra costs and fees, or subjected to any additional adverse consequence for failure to complete a program that does not provide competent interpretation and translation.

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## **Section 6: Identification of Need for Language Services.**

- Advance Notice: This judicial district informs individuals of their right to an ASL interpreter and other language services using the following forms of notice and in the manner specified:
  - A Notice of Right to Language Services (“NLR”) in English and in no fewer than the five most spoken languages in this district, providing a phone number and email address to request for an interpreter. The NLR is provided in the following fashion:
    - Automatic printing of standardized AOPC NLR for hearing notices and subpoenas, generated by MDJS and CPCMS.
    - An abbreviated NLR in this district’s five most spoken languages in addition to English, as approved by the AOPC and appearing on the back of our envelopes.
    - Through another method (attached to hearing notices generated by Court personnel).
  - Notice of Language Rights and the appropriate contact information for requesting an interpreter is included on all court brochures and informational materials.
  - Our judicial district will make the forthcoming UJS language access brochure available on our website.
  - Notice of Language Rights and the appropriate contact information for requesting an interpreter is posted on the court’s website at this link: <https://court.pikepa.org/languageaccess.html>
  - AOPC Right to Interpreter posters are placed prominently and near court or court office staff in:
    - All CCP court or court office reception/information desks or kiosks.
    - MDJ courts and court offices.

- "I Speak" cards in the five most common languages spoken in the judicial district, including a card in English for HI persons, are placed prominently and in close proximity to court or court office staff in:
    - All CCP court or court office reception/information desks or kiosks.
    - All CCP court or court office reception/information desks or kiosks.
  - A Notice of Right to Language Services ("NLR") in English and in no fewer than the five most spoken languages in this district, providing a phone number and email address to request for an interpreter.
- System to Receive and Process Requests for Language Services: This judicial district has procedures in place to receive and respond to requests for language services and to transmit them to LEP persons who contact court staff to inform them of their need for language services.
  - These services are available through the following methods of communication:
    - In person.
    - Telephone.
    - Email.
    - Website.
    - Portal.
    - United States Mail.
- Section 7: Keeping Data on the Need for and Use of Language Access Services.
  - In compliance with the UJS LAP, this judicial district inputs all data on the use of interpreters and other language access services into Language Access Data Collection ("LADC"), the statewide system for tracking this data.
  - This judicial district utilizes the "special consideration" feature in MDJS and CPCMS to indicate the need for an interpreter for cases in those systems.
  - This judicial district uses a spreadsheet indicating case information, language requested, requesting party, and the last provider used, to mark case files and scheduling documents with an "interpreter needed" designation, so there is an automatic mechanism to trigger language accommodation for an indicated matter.

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## **Section 8: Training & Continuing Education.**

This judicial district, in conjunction with the AOPC, will ensure that all employees are trained on appropriate provision of language access services. Judicial staff will attend training to assist them in: identifying and responding to LEP-HI clients, increase awareness of the services available, explain when and how to access and use those services effectively, explain stress and frustration coping when unable to communicate with a LEP-HI client, and procedures for receiving feedback and complaints. New employees, especially those who will have regular contact with the public, will be required to attend language access training.

All judicial district staff and county clerks will be offered and attend the following training on language access:

- Training developed by the AOPC, available online at:

[https://youtu.be/FObgm-ewIw4.](https://youtu.be/FObgm-ewIw4)

- For newly hired and current bilingual staff and their supervisors, the training developed by AOPC, available online at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuJP7e\\_znOU.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuJP7e_znOU)

Interpreters new to our judicial district receive an orientation to local judicial district processes and procedures by:

- Email, including standard information on policies and procedures.
- Local Court Interpreter Orientation Checklist created by the AOPC.
- Meet in person before a first appearance and provide information on our policies and procedures.
- We orient interpreters new to our facility in the following ways: NA.

In addition, this District provides the following training on language access:

- Periodic training for new judicial staff.
- Periodic training for employees who have frequent contact with the public.
- Language Access Basic Training, online training by New Mexico Administrative Office of Courts, available at <https://www.nmcenterforlanguageaccess.org/lafund/#/>.
- Other training.

## **Section 9: Outreach to Court Users & the Community.**

This judicial district consulted with the following community members in creation of this LAP:

- Prothonotary of Pike County, Pennsylvania.
- The Chief Public Defender of Pike County, Pennsylvania.
- The District Attorney of Pike County, Pennsylvania.

Upon approval of this LAP by the AOPC:

- This judicial district will post this LAP on its public website and/or public notification area within the courthouse and make copies available upon request.
- Copies of this LAP have been provided to all identifiable stakeholders in the LEP-HI community, including but not limited to the District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, local legal aid offices, local domestic violence or sexual assault programs, and other local agencies which serve LEP-HI individuals.

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## **Section 10: Monitoring & Evaluating the LAP; Complaint and Feedback Procedures.**

This judicial district will review this LAP annually to identify changes in need and update the plan accordingly. This LAP will remain in effect unless and until modified or updated. Review shall include the following areas which may indicate need for updates:

- Significant change in the number of LEP-HI persons requesting services;
- Changes in funding for LEP-HI services;
- Changes in need for translated materials;
- Feedback from the LEP-HI community and other stakeholders;
- Changes in court staff;
- Feedback from LEP-HI services training;
- Availability of language services and resources;
- Areas identified for improvement, including improper denial of services, excessive delay, and poor quality services; and
- Updated census data.

The Language Access Coordinator for this judicial district shall ensure that this plan is followed, advise the court on potential updates, and coordinate provision of services for the judicial district as they arise.

The Language Access Coordinator for this judicial district can be reached at [LAC@pikepa.org](mailto:LAC@pikepa.org).

This judicial district shall notify the AOPC when a new Language Access Coordinator is appointed and/or of any changes to the Language Access Coordinator's contact information.

All revision to this LAP shall be communicated to all court personnel, and updated versions of the Plan shall be posted on the court's website and in a public notification area inside the courthouse and distributed to all relevant stakeholders.

Any person has the right to file a complaint against this judicial district when they believe the judicial district failed to provide the necessary language services. The LAC shall take all reasonable steps to inform court users about the availability of the appropriate Language Access Complaint Form available at: <https://court.pikepa.org/languageaccess.html>

The LAC for this judicial district shall:

- Use the appropriate Language Access Complaint Form;
- Post the appropriate Complaint Form in the judicial district website with this LAP;
- Make hard copies of the Complaint Form readily available in court offices.

All complaint regarding this LAP shall be forwarded to the Language Access Coordinator for this judicial district.

- The Language Access Coordinator or a designee shall investigate any complaints that allege noncompliance with this LAP.
- If the investigation finds compliance, the Language Access Coordinator will inform the complainant in writing of this determination and the basis therefor.
- If the investigation finds noncompliance, the Language Access Coordinator will inform the complainant of the noncompliance in writing outlining the steps the judicial district will take to correct the noncompliance.
- The Language Access Coordinator will complete the Language Access Complaint Tracking Log provided by AOPC biannually and forward the log to the AOPC Coordinator for Court Access.

**Section 11: Certification.**

*I hereby certify that the information, supra, is true and correct, and that this Plan is effective on January 1, 2025.*

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Language Access Coordinator

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President Judge

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Date

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Date

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District Court Administrator

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Date