



**Language Access Plan (LAP)  
Wahkiakum County District Court**

# **Language Access Plan of Wahkiakum County District Court**

## **I. PURPOSE**

This LAP sets forth the Wahkiakum County District Court policy and procedures for the provision of timely language access services that ensure access for all limited English proficient (LEP), deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf/blind (D/HH/DB) individuals who come in contact with Wahkiakum County District Court services and programs. Language access services include both interpretation and translation services for LEP and D/HH/DB individuals.

## **II. COURT POLICY REGARDING LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES**

Under Washington state law (RCW 2.42 and 2.43), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (Safe Streets Act), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the regulations implementing these federal laws, Washington courts are required to provide language access services to all LEP and D/HH/DB individuals in civil and criminal court proceedings and in all court-managed services and programs and to develop a written language access plan pursuant to RCW 2.43.090.

It is the policy of Wahkiakum County District Court to provide foreign language interpreter services at no cost to LEP parties, witnesses, victims, and others with an interest (e.g., parents, legal guardians, custodians) in all court proceedings and operations, both civil and criminal, other than when it is the responsibility of other government bodies pursuant to state law. It is also the policy of this court to provide sign language interpreting services at no cost to persons who are D/HH/DB as required under applicable state and federal statutes and regulations.

*Wahkiakum County District Court* will provide accessible information to LEP and D/HH/DB persons on how to request these language assistance services and vital documents as part of its notice to the public about its language access services.

Although D/HH/DB individuals are covered under the ADA and RCW 2.42 rather than Title VI and the Safe Streets Act, this plan covers language access services for both D/HH/DB and LEP individuals.

## **III. DATA COLLECTION AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **A. Current Needs:**

The Wahkiakum County District Court Clerk's Office has reviewed the demographic data regarding the language needs of its community, from sources such as the following:

County Clerk's Office; Juvenile Office, Schools (Wahkiakum); WCSO Law Enforcement; Health Department; Family Health Center (Cathlamet Clinic); Jail; Prosecuting Attorney's Office; and Cowlitz Wahkiakum Legal Aid.

The most current language need identification efforts undertaken by Wahkiakum County District Court shows the following non-English languages, whether spoken or signed, that are most frequently used in our geographic area and court community:

- *Spanish*
- *Russian*
- *Cambodian/Khmer*
- *Vietnamese*
- *Laotian*
- *Chuukese*

**B. Identified Future Needs (if any)**

Wahkiakum County District Court has identified the following emerging and/or additional languages among court users in the area for which resources will be needed in the future:

- None identified

**IV. LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE IDENTIFICATION AND RESOURCES**

**A. Designated Language Access Office**

Wahkiakum County District Court has designated Wahkiakum County District Court Clerk's Office as the office responsible for coordinating language access services and to whom requests for interpreters and other language access services may be addressed. This designated office is available to:

- Develop lists of interpreters and secure interpreter services
- Receive and track language assistance requests;
- Provide information to assist LEP and D/HH/DB individuals to secure language access services;
- Assist court staff with securing language access services; and
- Answer questions from LEP and D/HH/DB individuals, and the public at large, regarding the court's available language access services.

LEP and D/HH/DB individuals, attorneys, justice partners, or any other parties in need of language access services may contact:

Wahkiakum County District Court  
Wahkiakum County Courthouse  
64 Main Street  
Cathlamet, WA 98612  
360-795-3461  
[DistrictCourt@co.wahkiakum.wa.us](mailto:DistrictCourt@co.wahkiakum.wa.us)

## **B. Identification of Language Access Needs and Notice of Availability**

LEP and D/HH/DB individuals may come in contact with court personnel via the phone, TTY / TDD, email, in-person, or through other means. In addition, there are various points of contact within Wahkiakum County District Court where LEP individuals or persons who are D/HH/DB will be in contact with court staff. Sometimes people who need language access services, including translated documents, will not request these services because they do not realize that such services are available at no charge, or because they do not recognize the level of English-language proficiency or communication ability needed to effectively participate in the court program, court proceeding, or court services. The first step in providing language access services is to enable LEP individuals or persons who are D/HH/DB to properly identify their language needs.

As a first step towards ensuring that LEP and D/HH/DB individuals are able to properly identify their language needs and to request language access and assistance services, Wahkiakum County District Court has a legal obligation to provide accessible notice to the public of an individual's right to spoken and sign language interpreter services and to be provided vital documents in translated form whenever necessary to access court proceedings and court-managed programs.

### **1. Identifying Language Needs at Points of Access**

Wahkiakum County District Court will identify language access needs at all points of contact with the court, such as the following:

- Telephone calls to the District Court Clerk's Office
- Written communication to the District Court Clerk's Office
- Court front counters
- Courtroom
- Probation Services

To ensure the earliest possible identification of the need for language access services, Wahkiakum County District Court has established internal protocols with various justice partners which routinely interact with this court in order for these partners to communicate to the appropriate court staff the needs of LEP

or D/HH/DB participants who will be coming into contact with the court. While justice partners themselves may be under a separate legal obligation to provide language access services to their clients, the court will be notified of any services that fall under the responsibility of the court as early as possible, so services may be provided in a timely and efficient manner. Examples of justice partners include:

- Jail staff
- Domestic violence victim's advocate
- Attorney/public defender
- Law enforcement (via citation form, probable cause, other)
- Judge and court staff

## **2. Notice of the Availability of Language Access Services**

In order to facilitate the ability of LEP and D/HH/DB individuals to request their need for language access services, Wahkiakum County District Court shall provide notice of the availability of language access services translated into Washington State's most frequently used languages that states:

*You have the right to an interpreter at no cost to you. To request these services, please contact the District Court Office, 360-795-3461*

Wahkiakum County District Court displays this notice on its website and at the following locations:

- Entrance to Courtroom
- Clerk's Office

This notice shall be posted in English and in the current needs languages identified in section III.A of this plan. Wahkiakum County District Court has Language Identification "I Speak" Cards available at its points of contact, including those listed above when appropriate, to help LEP and D/HH/DB and court staff communicate with each other.

Wahkiakum County District Court will maintain TTY services for D/HH court customers through the Federal Communications Commission's adopted 711 dialing code. To call someone using TRS (Telecommunications Relay Service), an individual may use either their TTY or dial 711 and it will directly connect to a TRS Operator. Both voice and TRS users can initiate a call from any telephone, anywhere in the United States free of charge.

When it appears that an individual has difficulty communicating due to a language barrier, Wahkiakum County District Court staff must inform the LEP or D/HH/DB person of his or her right to have language access services provided by the courts at no cost to them, even if the LEP or D/HH/DB person has not made a request for the language access services.

## **V. LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES**

Once Wahkiakum County District Court staff has determined interpreter services are required for an LEP or D/HH/DB individual, court staff have access to the following procedures for securing an interpreter.

### **A. Language Access Services Inside the Court Room**

#### **1. Appointment of a Certified, Registered, or Qualified Interpreter for In Court Proceedings**

The person responsible for appointing or securing the assistance of an interpreter at Wahkiakum County District Court (first: Court Administrator, second: Chief Clerk, or third: Deputy Clerk) will comply with the following order of preference in appointing an interpreter in RCW 2.43.030(1)(b). A certified interpreter who has been credentialed by the Administrative Office of the Courts shall be appointed, unless good cause is found and noted on the record by the court. "Good Cause" includes, but is not limited to, a determination that:

- 1) Given the totality of the circumstances, including the nature of the proceeding and the potential penalty or consequences involved, the services of a certified interpreter are not reasonably available to the court; or
- 2) The current list of certified interpreters maintained by the Administrative Office of the Courts does not include an interpreter in the language spoken by the LEP. (RCW 2.43.030(1)(b)).

If good cause is found for using an interpreter who is not certified by the Administrative Office of the Court or if a qualified interpreter is appointed, the court shall make a preliminary determination that the proposed interpreter is able to interpret accurately all communications to and from such person in that particular proceeding. The court shall satisfy itself on the record that the proposed interpreter:

- 1) Is capable of communicating effectively with the court and the person for who the interpreter would interpret; and
- 2) Has read, understands, and will abide by the code of ethics for language interpreters established by court rules. (RCW 2.43.030(2))

In the event court staff encounters difficulty scheduling a credentialed interpreter, court staff shall communicate the particular difficulty to a judicial officer to make a determination and/or give further instructions.

In the event no in-person or video-remote interpreter is available, the court or designated authority will weigh the need for moving forward with the proceeding against any possible negative consequences to the LEP or D/HH/DB person's

ability to effectively participate in the proceedings through the use of a remote interpreter, as may be allowed by Washington court rule or law. When evidentiary matters are before the court, the court shall reschedule the hearing until an in-person interpreter is available and can be present at the hearing.

Wahkiakum County District Court will NOT appoint as interpreters anyone with a potential conflict of interest in the case, including the following: minors; friends and family of the LEP or D/HH/DB person; advocates and attorneys; justice partner bilingual staff; or anyone deemed unqualified after being questioned by the court.

## **2. Practices in the Appointment and Use of Interpreters**

In appointing interpreters, staff at Wahkiakum County District Court will ensure that the interpreter and the LEP or D/HH/DB participant can effectively communicate. It is also the practice of Wahkiakum County District Court to:

- Only allow an LEP or D/HH/DB person to waive his or her right to the assistance of an interpreter if the waiver is knowing, voluntary, and on the record. The waiver of an interpreter may be rejected by the court or later revoked by the person.
- Require interpreters to provide sight translations for documents related to the court proceedings.
- Prohibit interpreters from assisting LEP or D/HH/DB with entering information on court forms without the involvement of court staff in the completion of such forms.
- Provide sign language interpreters for jurors who are D/HH/DB when such persons are called and selected for jury service

## **3. Calendaring and Scheduling of Interpreters for In-court and Out-of-court Contacts**

Wahkiakum County District Court will provide interpreter services in a timely manner. In order to provide high quality language access services in an efficient manner, Wahkiakum County District Court employs the following practices when applicable:

- Batching of matters for which an interpreter for a specific language is needed so long as this does not cause unnecessary delays in access and loss of remedies available to litigants, such as, criminal or protection order matters.
- Coordinating calendars so an interpreter may be available for several matters in the same court location on the same day.

- Coordinating the use of interpreters so that when an interpreter is not busy in a courtroom proceeding, he or she may be available in person or telephonically to assist in other services.
- Prioritizing interpreter cases so that they are heard as soon as the interpreter and necessary parties are available.

#### **4. Remote Interpreting**

For brief non-evidentiary hearings, Wahkiakum County District Court uses video remote interpreting (VRI) provided by credentialed interpreters and meets the requirements for providing effective communication, including:

- Real-time, full-motion video and audio;
- A clear, large image;
- A clear transmission of voices;
- Adequate training of staff in utilizing the equipment; and
- Use of properly trained interpreters.

### **B. Language Services Outside the Courtroom**

Wahkiakum County District Court is responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure that LEP, deaf and hearing-impaired individuals have meaningful access to court managed services outside the courtroom. The court, in compliance with federal and state civil rights laws and regulations, shall provide the most appropriate language access service for court managed services, including qualified interpreters, and translated materials and information. When the most appropriate language access service is the appointment of a qualified interpreter, the court shall follow the guidelines described for the appointment of interpreters. The Court shall provide language access services for:

- Attorney-Client interviews
- Investigator-Witness interviews
- Probation appointments
- Translation of letters/requests in other than English languages
- Payments of fines/tickets
- Electronic Home Monitoring setup
- Counter service

### **C. Translated Forms and Documents**

Wahkiakum County District Court understands the importance of translating forms, documents, and electronic materials into non-English languages, so that LEP individuals have greater access to the courts' services. Judicial and court staff shall not use web-based applications or software to process or provide translations for LEP individuals.

State forms which have been translated are available at [www.courts.wa.gov/forms](http://www.courts.wa.gov/forms).

Additional informational resources for District Court translated into Spanish include:

- [A Guide to Washington State Courts / Guía de los Tribunales del Estado de Washington](#)
- [Self-Represented Persons in District Court / Personas que se representan a sí mismas en el Tribunal de Distrito](#)
- [An Introduction to Small Claims Court / Una Introducción Al Juzgado De Demandas De Cuantía Menor](#)

Wahkiakum County District Court has not translated any local forms and relies solely on translated general pattern forms provided by the AOC. When translated forms are not available, this court may:

- Have an in-person interpreter sight translate the form
- Refer LEP (Limited English Proficiency) party to a community resource (local non-certified interpreters), including the Ethnic Support Council in Longview ([www.ethnicsupportcouncil.org](http://www.ethnicsupportcouncil.org)) or in an emergency a non-certified local resident.
- Use telephonic interpreting, such as Language Link, 1-888-338-7394.

Documents filed with the court requiring translation will be provided to a certified or qualified interpreter who has indicated proficiency in translation services. Translated documents will become part of the court file and maintained in accordance with the case management system or, for District Court, per the Secretary of State District and Municipal Court Records Retention Schedule. The Court may hold a colloquy with the submitting party to verify accuracy of the translation during court proceedings.

The courts will internally track requests for translation of forms and documents and, during the annual review of this Plan, determine which, if any, local or state forms should be translated based on frequency of use and cost of translation.

## **VI. TRAINING**

Wahkiakum County District Court is committed to providing training for all judicial and court staff members who encounter LEP and D/HH/DB individuals in order to ensure the successful delivery of language access services. The court will provide staff training on all requirements in this Language Access Plan.

Training efforts will include an initial training for new staff on the requirements of the current Language Access Plan and bi-annual training for existing court personnel that addresses any revisions made to the Plan.

Resources and information regarding language access services, policies and procedures are available on the District Court's website, and tools for providing language assistance (such as bench cards, language identification guides, brochures,

etc.) are available to all court staff and decision makers at the Clerk's Office.

## **VII. COMPLAINT PROCESS FOR NON-COMPLIANCE**

### **A. Complaints Against Local Court**

This specific complaint process is designed to bring to the attention of the local court allegations filed by LEP or D/HH/DB parties that the local court is out of compliance with its own Language Access Plan, any applicable federal statutes or regulations, state statutory provisions, such as RCW 2.42 or 2.43 and/or any applicable state or local court rules.

#### **Local Court Complaint Process**

1. Within 30 days of specific event, submit a letter to the LAP Contact Person (Court Administrator) providing details of the complaint including date and specific failures of court personnel or interpreter to follow language plan and provide required services.
2. The complaint will be reviewed by the Court Administrator and a decision made on whether the Court Administrator acts on the court's level or submits it to the AOC Court Interpreter Commission for further action.
3. The Court will respond to the complaint within five (5) business days.
4. Any complaint not resolved at the local court level may be filed with the Court Interpreter Commission.

#### **Complaints filed with the court should be sent to:**

Heather Odom  
Wahkiakum County District Court Administrator  
64 Main Street  
PO Box 144  
Cathlamet, WA 98612  
[odomh@co.wahkiakum.wa.us](mailto:odomh@co.wahkiakum.wa.us)  
360-795-3461

### **B. Complaint Filed with the Court Interpreter Commission**

1. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the complaint must be filed with the Commission by an aggrieved party within 60 days from the date of the events on which the complaint is based.

Within 3 business days of the receipt of the complaint against a local court, Commission staff will inform complainant, using the contact information provided by complainant, of their option to file their complaint with the Department of Justice and of the need to file such complaint

within 180 days from the date of the alleged discrimination.

2. Complaints filed must be in writing and must be signed. The complaint must include the following information:
  - a. A clear and brief description of the complaint and any evidence upon which the allegation is based, with relevant supporting documentation. The description and supporting evidence should include relevant facts that support the complaint that the court did not provide language assistance services;
  - b. If possible, the complaint should identify the section(s) of the court's plan, statutes or regulations alleged to have been violated and the time frame in which the lack of compliance is alleged to have occurred;
  - c. Disclosure of any other channels the complainant is pursuing, including legal action number (optional); and
  - d. A statement authorizing the Commission to send a copy of the complaint to the court that is the subject of the complaint.

**Complaints filed with the Interpreter Commission should be sent to:**

Washington State Interpreter Commission  
c/o Interpreter Commission Staff  
Administrative Office of the Courts  
PO Box 41170  
Olympia, WA 98504-1170

OR

by email to James Wells at [james.wells@courts.wa.gov](mailto:james.wells@courts.wa.gov)

3. Interpreter Commission Complaint Review
  - a. The Commission shall determine whether the complaint alleges facts that raise issues relating to the court's compliance with its LAP, federal civil rights laws, chapters 2.42 and/or 2.43 RCW or court rules. This determination shall be made within 10 business days of receiving the complaint. The Commission may request additional information from the complainant if appropriate. If the Commission concludes that the complaint does not raise issues relating compliance with the LAP, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, chapters 2.42 and/or 2.43 RCW, the matter will be closed, and the complainant will be notified of the decision.
  - b. If the Commission determines that the complaint may raise possible compliance issues, the complaint shall be sent to the court and a

response requested. The Commission ordinarily will request the presiding judge of the court or their designee to respond within 30 days.

- c. If the response from the court establishes that the court is not out of compliance with respect to the matters raised in the complaint, the Commission will close the matter.

If the court's response does not clearly establish that it is operating in compliance with the matters raised by the complaint, the Commission may appoint a factfinder to investigate the issues raised by the complaint and to report on the court's response, if necessary. The complaint, the court's response, and fact-finder's report, if any, shall be referred to the Commission for any further action deemed necessary by the Commission.

- d. The person making the complaint will be notified promptly regarding the conclusion of the Commission's review.

### **III. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF LAP**

#### **A. LAP Approval & Notification**

Wahkiakum County District Court LAP has been approved by the District Court Administrator and a copy has been forwarded to Washington State Administrative Office of Courts' Interpreter Program Coordinator. Any revisions to the Plan are to be submitted to the District Court Judge and Court Administrator for approval, and then forwarded to the Interpreter Program Coordinator. Copies of the Wahkiakum County District Court LAP shall be provided upon request. In addition, the court shall post its LAP on its own website at: <https://www.co.wahkiakum.wa.us/316/District-Court>

#### **B. Outreach and Communication of Plan**

Wahkiakum County District Court shall inform the public of the existence of the LAP and to this end, the court will:

Collaborate with local bar associations, justice partners and other relevant organizations to ensure distribution of information.

Establish mechanisms for obtaining feedback from the public, attorneys and justice partners regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the administrative protocol and take this feedback into account at the yearly evaluation of the protocol.

#### **C. Annual Evaluation of the LAP**

Wahkiakum County District Court will conduct an annual needs assessment to

determine whether changes to the LAP are needed. To this end, the court will continue to communicate on an ongoing basis with Courthouse staff, LEP and D/HH/DB persons, attorneys, and the public to determine any changes that are needed.

This assessment will be done by reviewing various areas in which the court provides language access services, taking into consideration the number of interpreters requested by language in the courts and the identification of emerging changes in the languages spoken or signed. Elements of the assessment evaluation shall include:

- Number of LEP or D/HH/DB persons requesting court interpreters;
- Assessment of current languages; and
- Assessing whether staff members adequately understand LAP policies and procedures and how to carry them out.

Any revisions made to the Plan will be communicated to all court personnel, and an updated version of the plan will be posted on the court's web site. In addition, Wahkiakum County District Court will submit to the AOC a copy of any updated information contained in this LAP within 60 days of its approval.

#### **D. Ideas for Future Improvements in Language Access**

Wahkiakum County District Court will review the results of its annual needs assessment and conduct the following activities:

- Identify any challenges or trends the court is experiencing with providing language access services, sourcing of interpreters, and website information that is accessible to LEP and D/HH/DB individuals.
- Identify and implement changes or improvements identified by the court to improve language access services that are within the scope of this LAP.

#### LAP Contact Persons

##### **State Contact:**

James Wells  
AOC Interpreter Program  
1112 Quince St. SE  
PO Box 41170  
Olympia, WA 98504-1170  
[James.Wells@courts.wa.gov](mailto:James.Wells@courts.wa.gov)

##### **Local Contact:**

Heather Odom  
Wahkiakum County District Court Administrator  
64 Main Street  
PO Box 144  
Cathlamet, WA 98612  
[odomh@co.wahkiakum.wa.us](mailto:odomh@co.wahkiakum.wa.us)  
360-795-3461

The effective date of this LAP plan is 10/30/2024 .