



Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts

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PRESS RELEASE

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Georgia Awarded National Grant to Improve Court Interpreter Services

Atlanta, GA — The Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Interpreters has received a \$15,000 technical assistance grant to develop a model protocol that will help state courts meet their obligations to provide interpreters and other language services. Funding for this project was made available by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) as part of a larger national initiative supported by the State Justice Institute (SJI). SJI was established by federal law in 1984 to award grants to improve the quality of justice in state courts and to foster innovative, efficient solutions to common issues faced by all courts.

“SJI remains committed to improving language access in the state courts, and continues to support national, state, and local court efforts addressing this critical issue,” said Jonathan Mattiello, SJI Executive Director. “We are happy to assist the Commission and its stakeholders in developing this model protocol, which will contribute to language access in Georgia.”

The grant will allow the Commission to draft a step-by-step administrative guide for the provision of language services. The guide, the first of its kind in Georgia, will promote the reliable and efficient provision of language services in state courts throughout Georgia, both for persons with limited English proficiency and for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. The guide will be adaptable to local needs.

“The goal of the project is to help Georgia trial courts identify the best ways in which they can address the language needs of our population, from an individual’s first contact with a court to his last,” said Justice Keith R. Blackwell, Chair of the Commission. “We are grateful to the National Center for State Courts and the State Justice Institute for funding this critical project.”

“We understand that trial courts in different parts of the state face different problems,” Justice Blackwell said. “We want to help them identify their options for meeting their obligations to provide language services.”

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In addition to creating an administrative guide, the project will identify best practices that courts can use to collect data and assess the specific language needs of the populations that they serve. The project will also identify tools for everyday use in the courts, such as educational brochures for community members and attorneys, and reference materials for judges to use to ensure the proper appointment of qualified interpreters.

Commission member Jana J. Edmondson-Cooper, Bilingual Staff Attorney at the Georgia Legal Services Program in Macon, initiated the effort and will work collaboratively with Shinji Morokuma, staff director for the Commission, to spearhead the project on the Commission's behalf.

Edmondson-Cooper and Morokuma will work closely with consultant Cristina Llop as well as key language access stakeholders to develop the guide. Llop, an attorney and federally certified interpreter, recently served as a consultant for the Judicial Council of California's Strategic Plan for Language Access, which was unveiled in early 2015.
