



# **Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts Language Access Program Manual**

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## **1. Introduction**

The Illinois Supreme Court is committed to ensuring language assistance services and access to justice for people of limited English proficiency (LEP). As part of that commitment, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) developed the Illinois Supreme Court Language Access Program to train and test interpreters, educate court officials on best practices for using interpreters, translate court forms, and address related language access issues. This document outlines the procedures and policies for the recruitment, training, and certification of persons to act as qualified interpreters in a court proceeding and for the coordination, retention and training of those interpreters.

Court interpretation is a specialized and highly demanding form of interpreting. It requires skills that few bilingual individuals, including language instructors, possess. To gain access to other professionals in the field, the AOIC became a member of the Council of Language Access Coordinators (Council), a council under the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). The components of the Illinois Language Access Program are based on model policies developed by the Council but were modified to meet Illinois's needs.

## **2. Certification requirements for foreign language interpreters and program fees**

The Illinois Language Access Program maintains a Court Interpreter Registry (Registry) that is distributed to circuit courts statewide and is made publicly available on the AOIC website. The Registry lists four different types of interpreters: registered, qualified and certified foreign language interpreters and eligible sign language interpreters. Requirements for each type are indicated by an "X" in the chart below. Each program component is described in greater detail below the chart.

Program components	Fees	Not on statewide registry	On statewide registry			
		Unregistered*	Registered	Qualified	Certified	Sign language
Two-day Orientation	\$200	X*	X	X	X	X
NCSC Written Exam	\$50		X	X	X	
NCSC Oral Exam	\$225		X – 60%	N/A	X – 70%	N/A
NCSC Oral exam; out of state test takers	\$300		X – 60%	N/A	X – 70%	N/A
Oral Proficiency Interview	\$130		N/A	X	N/A	N/A
Criminal Background Check	\$0		N/A	X	X	X
Signed Oath of Office	\$0		X	X	X	X

#### a. Two-Day Orientation

The AOIC offers two-day introductory court interpreter orientation programs. This orientation provides foreign and sign language interpreters with an overview of the court's needs and expectations. It covers ethical conduct, court interpreting protocols, legal terminology and procedures, and basic interpreting skills. The 14-hour orientation is typically completed over two days.

Attendance at a two-day orientation is a mandatory step for all interpreter candidates, regardless of the language(s) they speak, unless they have attended a similar training in another state and qualify for reciprocity (see Section 6). Candidates may choose whether they'd like to attend the orientation or take the written exam first, allowing them the flexibility to start with either step based on their preference.

Training materials will be provided during the orientation, including information on the certification process, the code of ethics for court interpreters, recommended practices, terminology, court system overview, glossaries, and a list of other resources and practice materials.

All interested participants should email [lirsupport@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:lirsupport@illinoiscourts.gov) with their full name to request a username and password prior to the orientation or written exam. Please allow a few business days for processing. Once credentials are received via email, participants can register online and complete a profile that includes contact information, interpreting experience, qualifications, and areas of interest. Detailed submission instructions are included on the application form. If space in the orientation is limited, priority will be given to those with higher levels of court interpreting experience, as indicated in their

application. Participants must be at least 18 years old to attend. Online registrations must be completed in advance of the orientation and will be closed out two weeks before the event date. Last-minute registrations will not be allowed.

A \$200 payment is required at the time of registration for the orientation. All payments must be made electronically via E-Pay. Individuals who do not submit payment by the deadline will be removed from the orientation.

#### **i. Fee Waiver for Full-time County Staff Interpreters**

Full-time staff interpreters employed by the circuit court are eligible to have the orientation fee waived. Court administrators must confirm the list of eligible full-time staff interpreters for each circuit court to the AOIC. For the purposes of the fee waiver, “full-time” employment is defined as working a minimum of 37.5 hours a week with benefits.

#### **ii. Accommodation for the two-day orientation**

An individual with a recognized disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) who requires reasonable accommodations to participate at training must submit a request with the application, which is included on the [Language Interpreter Registry](#) (LIR) registration form. The AOIC Senior Program Manager for Language Access will consider timely requests and advise the applicant of the accommodations that can be provided.

#### **b. Written Examination**

The written examination, designed specifically for foreign language interpreters, can be taken either before or after the two-day orientation. Participants may choose the order that best suits their preferences, allowing them to attend the orientation first or complete the written exam first. The written exam is used as a screening device to determine eligibility to sit for the oral examination or an oral proficiency interview (OPI). The multiple-choice test covers general English proficiency, legal terminology, and interpreter ethics and was developed by the Council. The passing score is 80% for being eligible to sit for the oral exam or an oral proficiency interview. A payment of \$50 will be due upon registration for the written exam. Test candidates will receive their scores via email within two-four weeks of their test date.

#### **i. Retake on Written Examination**

If another version of the multiple-choice test is available, the interpreter must wait at least three (3) months before re-taking. An interpreter candidate may take the

same version of the test after twelve (12) months, but no candidate will be allowed to take any version of the multiple-choice test more than twice.

#### **ii. Rescore on Written Examination**

All scores on the multiple-choice examination are final. There is no option for requesting a re-score for the written test.

#### **iii. Waiver of Written Examination**

Interpreters who are certified by the federal courts, other states, or another entity with reciprocity may waive the written examination (see Section 6).

#### **iv. Fee Waiver for Full-time County Staff Interpreters**

Full-time staff interpreters employed by the circuit court are eligible to have the written examination fee waived for the first examination only. If a candidate fails the examination and elects to retake the examination, subsequent fees will not be waived. Court administrators must confirm the list of eligible full-time staff interpreters for each circuit court to the AOIC. For the purposes of the fee waiver, "full-time" employment is defined as working a minimum of 37.5 hours a week with benefits.

### **c. Oral Examination**

Oral certification examinations are designed to determine whether candidates possess the minimum levels of language knowledge and interpreting skills required to perform competently during court proceedings. The tests are substantially similar in structure and content to tests that have been developed by the federal courts. The tests are developed for the Council by consultants who have extensive knowledge of courts and court proceedings, the job requirements for court interpreters, and/or advanced training or high levels of fluency in English and the non-English language. These experts may include federally certified court interpreters, judges and lawyers, scholars, and/or legal professionals.

The test measures language knowledge and fluency in both languages and the ability to successfully render meaning from source to target language in each of the three modes of interpreting that are required of court interpreters. The three modes of interpreting include:

- simultaneous interpreting;
- consecutive interpreting;
- sight translation of documents.

A full oral examination is available in the following languages: Arabic, Cantonese, French, Haitian Creole, Hmong, Ilocano, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

An abbreviated oral examination is available in the following languages: – Consecutive only; Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian (BSC); Marshallese; and Turkish.

Open testing periods are offered multiple times per year with registration closing at least three weeks prior to the testing date. To register for the oral certification examination, candidates must register via the LIR. If individuals are having issues registering in the LIR they should contact the AOIC Senior Program Manager or the Program Coordinator via email or telephone to schedule individual appointments. Slots are held on a first come first served basis. Complete test fees must be received prior to the testing date to hold a candidate's testing slot. Walk-ins are not allowed. All test candidates must show valid identification with a photograph prior to testing. To review details about exam sections and how the exam will be proctored, please review the NCSC's oral exam overview: [http://illinoiscourts.gov/CivilJustice/LanguageAccess/Overview\\_of\\_oral\\_exam\\_2012.pdf](http://illinoiscourts.gov/CivilJustice/LanguageAccess/Overview_of_oral_exam_2012.pdf)

**For certified status:** the passing level is a score of 70% or higher on each part of the examination (Sight Translation, Consecutive, and Simultaneous). For the Sight Translation part, test candidates must score 65% or higher on each individual portion of the Sight Translation with an overall score of 70% or higher. The tests are graded by a team of Council-approved test raters. Interpreters will receive their test scores as soon as possible after the test date.

**For registered status:** the passing level is a score of 60% or higher on each part of the examination (Sight Translation, Consecutive, and Simultaneous). For the Sight Translation part, test candidates must score 55% or higher on each individual portion of the Sight Translation with an overall score of 60% or higher. The tests are graded by a team of Council-approved test raters. Interpreters will receive their test scores as soon after the test date as is practical. Interpreters that speak a language that is not tested by the oral exam may be required to take an oral proficiency interview (see subsection (d) below).

An interpreter with a disability who requires reasonable accommodations must submit a written request at the same time the test reservation time is made. The AOIC Senior Program Manager for Language Access will consider timely requests and advise the applicant of the type of accommodation that can be provided. The AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access may request additional information, including medical documentation and opinions, prior to providing accommodations.

#### **i. Cancellation Policy**

If a candidate cancels their oral exam within three-weeks (15 business days) of the exam date, the candidate will be assessed a \$50 processing fee. The AOIC will refund the candidate in full, and the candidate will have to pay the \$50 cancellation fee before they are able to sign up for another exam or skill building course. The Oral Proficiency Interview must be cancelled 24 hours prior to the scheduled date and time. Later cancellations will be charged the full amount. The AOIC cannot issue partial refunds. The only exception to this cancellation policy is in the case of an emergency. Candidates must contact the AOIC and submit an explanation via writing if the cancellation is due to an emergency.

If a candidate cancels their oral exam more than three- weeks before the exam date, they will have a one-time option of transferring their exam to a future exam date. If the candidate does not wish to transfer the exam date, they will be issued a full refund (**Note on refunds:** the card used to pay for the exam must still be open for the AOIC to be able to perform a refund. If the bank account is closed, the AOIC will not be able to issue a refund as the office cannot issue checks). A candidate that cancels their oral exam with less than three weeks' notice will be charged a \$50 cancellation fee. Candidates that cancel and reschedule their oral exam date more than once, will be assessed a \$100 fee. The full oral exam cancellation policy can be found in the Appendix.

## **ii. Late Arrival and No-Show Policy**

If a candidate does not appear for the exam and fails to notify AOIC of an emergency, or if a candidate arrives more than 15 minutes late without notification, they will be considered a no-show. In such cases, the candidate will not be eligible for a refund or to sit for the exam and must reschedule.

Candidates who notify AOIC that they will be more than 15 minutes late will have their refund eligibility determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account prior scheduled exams and exam timing.

## **iii. Retake**

If another version of the oral test is available, the interpreter candidate must wait at least six (6) months before retaking it. An interpreter may take the same version of the test after twelve (12) months, but no interpreter will be allowed to take any version of the oral examination more than twice unless the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access determines a valid reason for doing so exists. If an interpreter candidate passes one or two parts of the oral examination, they may retake only that section or sections the candidate did not pass up to a period of eighteen (18) months from the date the test candidate first took the oral examination. If a candidate's eighteen (18) months are ending, the AOIC may suspend the six (6) months waiting period if another test version is available. If a test candidate only has to retake one portion of the oral examination, the AOIC may suspend the six (6) months waiting period if another test version is available. If a test candidate



does not pass the remaining section(s) of the oral examination within an 18-month period, they must retake the entire oral exam and a new 18-month period will commence.

#### **iv. Rescore**

If a test candidate passes two parts of the oral examination and scores 67% or higher on the third part, the candidate can request a rescore. The candidate will bear the cost of the rescore. The score(s) on any re-rated section will be considered the final score(s) of the candidate. If a candidate scores below 67% on the third part, the candidate may not request a rescore.

#### **v. Waiver**

Interpreters who are certified by the federal courts, other states, or another entity with reciprocity may waive the oral examination (see Section 6).

#### **vi. Fee Waiver for Full-time County Staff Interpreters**

Full-time staff interpreters employed by the circuit court are eligible for a waiver of the oral examination fee for their first test. If a full-time staff interpreter is proficient in multiple languages, the fee waiver also applies to testing in any additional language not previously tested. If a candidate fails the examination and elects to retake the examination or retake any part(s) of the examination, subsequent fees will not be waived. Court administrators must confirm the list of eligible full-time staff interpreters for each circuit court to the AOIC. For the purposes of the fee waiver, "full-time" employment is defined as working a minimum of 37.5 hours a week with benefits.

#### **vii. Fee Waiver for Language Access Scholarship recipients**

Individuals who qualify for the Language Access Scholarship will have their orientation, written exam, and oral exam fees fully waived. In addition, the scholarship will cover 50% of the costs for up to two retakes of either the written exam, oral exam, or Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI).

This scholarship is designed to support prospective interpreters by reducing financial barriers and encouraging continued professional development. More details on eligibility requirements, application deadlines, and the application process can be found [here](#).

#### **d. Oral Proficiency Interview**

An OPI is an assessment of language proficiency through an oral interview over the phone with a company called ALTA. The AOIC does not administer OPI exams. If you would like a detailed description of ALTA's test development, please contact the AOIC. OPIs allow candidates to display language fluency in many more languages than currently available by the NCSC oral exam. The interviews are designed to target the full range of language skills in both English and the second language (making recommendations, expressing an opinion, etc). An OPI does not test a candidate's interpreting skills. A passing score on the OPI is Advanced Plus or higher. Candidates must contact the AOIC 10 business days prior to schedule an appointment. There is no waiting period to re-take an OPI, as long as 10 business days' notice is given.

#### **e. Skill Building Workshops**

The AOIC may offer additional language-neutral or language-specific skill building workshops for interpreters. These workshops are designed to help improve interpreting skills and build vocabulary. Candidates are eligible to sign-up for skill building if they have attended a two-day orientation and passed the written exam with an 80% or higher. Space is limited and is on a first come first served basis. The AOIC reserves the right to cancel a skill building workshop if a minimum amount of candidates have not registered by the deadline.

#### **f. Accommodations at Written, OPI, or Oral Exam**

A test candidate with a recognized disability under the ADA may request an accommodation by submitting a timely written request. Requests for an accommodation during the written exam must be submitted on the form entitled "Documentation of Accommodation for the Court Interpreter Written Exam" at least three weeks in advance of the written testing date (see Appendix A). Requests for an accommodation during the oral exam must be submitted on the form entitled "Documentation of Accommodation for the Court Interpreter Oral Certification Exam" at least six weeks in advance of the oral testing date (see Appendix B). The AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access will consider all requests and advise the applicant of the accommodation that can be provided.

#### **g. Character and Fitness Requirement: Criminal Background Check**

To protect the integrity of court proceedings and the safety of the public, interpreters are required to meet a character and fitness standard. A court interpreter should be one whose record of conduct justifies the trust of the courts, witnesses, jurors, attorneys, parties, and the public. A record manifesting significant deficiency in the honesty, trustworthiness, diligence or reliability of an applicant is material to performance as a court interpreter and may warrant a denial of participation within the certification program or removal from the Registry of interpreters.

All foreign language interpreters who have satisfactorily completed the oral proficiency requirements shall be subject to a criminal background check performed through the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts before becoming certified. Eligible sign language interpreters attending the court interpreter training will also need to submit to a background check to be listed on the AOIC Registry. The following may constitute grounds for failing the background check:

- Conviction, within the past 10 years of any type of felony or a misdemeanor involving fraud, dishonesty, corruption, moral turpitude, or false statements; or
- Any conviction within the past 10 years related to ethical violations and the functions and duties of a court interpreter.

If upon screening, the AOIC language access program finds a criminal conviction that may be material to the interpreter candidate's performance as a court interpreter and the candidate intends to pursue certification, the matter will be referred to the Language Access Advisory Board (see Section 5). In deciding whether referral to the Language Access Advisory Board is appropriate, the AOIC language access program may take into consideration other factors such as age of the candidate when the conviction occurred, length of time from when the crime was committed, nature and seriousness of the offense, and disposition. For more details about the Language Access Advisory Board's review process, see Section 5.

#### **h. Character and Fitness Requirement: Code of Interpreter Ethics**

The Illinois Supreme Court adopted an Illinois Code of Interpreter Ethics (Code), effective October 1, 2014. The Code clarifies the proper scope of an interpreter's role and their responsibilities. The standards also establish duties to (1) interpret accurately without omissions or additions, (2) not offer legal advice, (3) maintain confidentiality for privileged communications, (4) be proficient in both English and the foreign language, (5) be impartial to all parties involved, and (6) report errors and other serious communication difficulties to the court, among other requirements. Violations of this Code may result in the interpreter being removed from a case, denied future appointments by the courts, being removed from the statewide interpreter Registry maintained by the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts, or losing credentials if the interpreter has been certified or registered pursuant to the rules of the Illinois Supreme Court. The Language Access Advisory Board will ensure compliance with the character and fitness requirements. See Section 5 for more details about the review process.

### **3. Registry requirements for sign language interpreters**

Sign language interpreters interested in being included on the AOIC Registry are required to have Master's or Advanced level licensure with the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC). Sign language interpreters with the requisite licensure must attend

a two-day orientation to be included on the AOIC Registry. This orientation is designed to give interpreters an overview of the needs and expectations of the court, ethical conduct, protocols for court interpreting, legal terminology and procedure, and basic interpreting skills. The orientation program lasts 14 hours, typically over a two-day period. Attendance at the two-day orientation is a mandatory first step for all sign language interpreter candidates seeking to be listed on the AOIC Registry.

#### 4. Court Interpreter Registry

The AOIC Language Access Program will maintain a statewide Registry of certified, qualified and registered foreign language interpreters and eligible sign language interpreters and CART providers for use by judges, clerks of court, attorneys, law enforcement, social service agencies, and others needing legally trained interpreters. The general criteria for all spoken and sign languages are listed below:

Program components	Fees	Not on statewide registry	On statewide registry			
		Unregistered *	Registered	Qualified	Certified	Sign language
Two-day Orientation	\$200	X*	X	X	X	X
NCSC Written Exam	\$50					
NCSC Oral Exam	\$225**		N/A	N/A	X	N/A
NCSC Oral exam; out of state test takers	\$300		N/A	N/A	X	N/A
Oral Proficiency Interview	\$130		N/A	X	N/A	N/A
Criminal Background Check	\$0		N/A	X	X	X
Signed Oath of Office	\$0		X	X	X	X

\*An interpreter who does not attend orientation or does not pass the written exam will also be considered unregistered.

\*\* Oral exam fees vary according to the cost of scoring the exam by language (scoring is more expensive for less common languages).

\*\*\* A separate orientation program for sign language interpreters will be offered by the Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission (IDHHC) for Master's and Advanced level license holders (see Section 3).

The Registry of court interpreters is a searchable application available on the court's public website. The Registry is organized by certification status. Within each certification status, the Registry is organized alphabetically by language, and within each language, the interpreters are listed alphabetically by last name. The Registry also lists interpreter contact

information and the judicial circuits in which an interpreter is willing to work. When using the Registry, the AOIC Language Access Program strongly recommends:

- Sign language interpreters listed on the Registry should be the first choice for legal proceedings either in-person or, if appropriate, remotely.
- Certified or qualified foreign language interpreters should be the first choice for legal proceedings either in-person or, if appropriate, remotely.
- Registered foreign language interpreters may be considered a second choice for legal proceedings either in-person or remotely if no certified interpreter is readily available.
- For languages for which there is no oral certification exam (see Section 2(c)), registered interpreters should be the first choice for legal proceedings either in-person or, if appropriate, remotely.

The purpose of the Registry is to help courts and other law-related agencies hire well-qualified interpreters on a freelance basis. The fact that an interpreter is listed on the Registry does not indicate an employment relationship with the Illinois Supreme Court or any circuit or local court. Court interpreters working on an individual contract basis or for agencies are not employees of the courts. Interpreters listed on the Registry may request inactive status by contacting the AOIC Senior Program Manager or Program Coordinator. Interpreters may reactivate at any time upon notification to the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access, or Program Coordinator provided other program requirements have been met.

## **5. Language Access Advisory Board**

The Language Access Advisory Board's (Board) charge is to consider all relevant information presented and to make a recommendation to the AOIC Director as to whether an interpreter's character and fitness are sufficient to ensure the integrity and competence of interpreting services and the maintenance of high standards in the administration of justice such that the interpreter be included on the AOIC statewide interpreter registry. Relevant information may include but is not limited to:

- Criminal background check results that may be material to the certified interpreter candidate's performance as a court interpreter; or
- Allegations via a written complaint that a certified, qualified or registered interpreter on the AOIC statewide Registry has violated the Illinois Code of Interpreter Ethics.

The Board consists of five members. The composition of the Board is two retired Illinois judges, the AOIC Deputy Director, Director of the Access to Justice Division and the Senior Program Manager, Language Access.

#### **a. Character and Fitness review process**

All foreign language interpreters who have satisfactorily completed the oral proficiency requirements shall be subject to a criminal background check performed through the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts. Eligible sign language interpreter attending the court interpreter training will also have to submit to a background check to be listed on the AOIC registry. The following may constitute grounds for failing the background check:

- Conviction, within the past 10 years of any type of felony or a misdemeanor involving fraud, dishonesty, corruption, moral turpitude, or false statements; or
- any conviction within the past 10 years related to ethical violations and the functions and duties of a court interpreter.

If upon screening, the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access finds a criminal conviction that may be material to the interpreter candidate's performance as a court interpreter and the candidate intends to pursue certification, the matter will be referred to the Language Access Advisory Board. In deciding whether referral to the Board is appropriate, the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access may take into consideration other factors such as age of candidate when the conviction occurred, length of time from when the crime was committed, nature and seriousness of the offense, and disposition.

If the matter is referred to the Board, the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access will gather relevant information related to the conduct in question. The AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access will send a cover letter along with a copy of all supporting relevant information to the individual. The individual will have an opportunity to submit a written response to the AOIC.

The individual may also request an in-person hearing with the Board in lieu of submitting a written response or in addition to submitting a written response. If an in-person hearing is requested, a date, time and location at which all Board members can meet in person will be scheduled. The AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access will provide the interpreter with written notice of the hearing. The interpreter may be represented by counsel and may present evidence. The Board may request or gather additional information at the conclusion of the hearing. All hearings will be recorded and shall be private and confidential.

After submission of a written response, the Board will issue a timely report and recommendation to the Director as to whether the interpreter candidate possesses the character and fitness necessary to perform the duties of a court interpreter. If the individual did not provide a written response to the Board for consideration, members shall make a recommendation with the supporting information alone.

Upon receipt and review of the Board's report and recommendation, the Director will issue a final decision as to whether the interpreter will be allowed to continue with the certification process. A letter shall be sent to the interpreter informing him or her of the Director's decision along with the report and recommendation of the Board and copies of any information the Board may have considered in making its recommendation.

If an interpreter has been removed from the Registry or has not been allowed to continue with the certification process, the interpreter may apply for reconsideration after a 2-year period from the date of denial has passed or other specified date as determined by the Director. The review process governing character and fitness evaluations, along with any supporting documents submitted on behalf of the interpreter, are confidential and will be shared only with the interpreter and any Illinois licensed attorney retained by the interpreter that has filed an appearance with the Board.

#### **b. Complaint Procedure and review process**

Complaints may be filed against interpreters who are listed on the AOIC interpreter registry. All complaints must be in writing and the Interpreter Grievance Form must be completed. The Interpreter Grievance Form can be found [here](#). Possible reasons for discipline include:

- Violation of the Illinois Code of Interpreter Ethics;
- Gross incompetence;
- Non-compliance with the program's policies and procedures;
- Engaging in action that calls into question the interpreter's ability to work effectively in court.

Any person may initiate a complaint against an interpreter by filing it with the Office of the Chief Judge or the Trial Court Administrator of the circuit where the conduct giving rise to the complaint took place. The complaint can also be filed directly with the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access. All complaints must be in writing, must be signed, and must describe the alleged inappropriate conduct. The complaint grievance form can be found [here](#). After receipt of a complaint, the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access will commence review of the complaint to determine its merit. If further review is required, the interpreter will be provided with written notice of the allegation(s) within twenty (20) days, and will be asked to provide a written response to the complaint within twenty (20) days of receiving written notice of the allegation(s).

Upon receipt of the interpreter's response, the AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access will forward the complaint, response and any supporting documentation, including any court transcripts of the proceedings if available, to the Board within seven (7) days. The Board shall confer within twenty (20) days of receipt of the complaint and any supporting documents to determine whether further action is required. If the complaint is found to be

insufficient, the complaint shall be dismissed, and the complainant and interpreter shall be notified in writing that no further disciplinary action will take place.

If it is determined by the Board that there was probable cause that an ethical violation occurred, or if no response is filed by the interpreter, members of the Board may determine what further action is required. The Board may set a hearing to review the complaint, conduct fact-finding meetings or conferences, or review the matter by considering all information as submitted. If no hearing is set, the Board will issue a recommendation to the Director as to a possible disposition and proposed sanctions, if any.

If a hearing is set, the interpreter shall be notified by mail of the time and date of the hearing, which shall be set no later than thirty (30) days after a determination that probable cause exists. The interpreter shall receive a copy of any additional materials the Board may have considered in deciding that an ethical violation probably occurred. All hearings will be recorded and shall be private and confidential. The hearings may be conducted remotely over video conference or teleconference, if necessary. The Board may, in its discretion, call witnesses, consider or clarify any evidence presented, giving such evidence the weight it deems appropriate. The interpreter may be represented by counsel, and shall be able to testify, comment on the allegations, and call witnesses. All testimony taken shall be under oath.

After the hearing, the Board will issue a recommendation to the Director as to a possible disposition and proposed sanctions if members find the interpreter committed any of the actions described in this section.

Efforts to resolve the complaint informally may be initiated by the interpreter and the complainant at any time. Any resolution reached must be submitted in writing to the Board for approval. Upon approval of any resolution reached informally, or subsequent to any review without a hearing, the Board will notify the complainant and the interpreter of its written approval of the informal resolution.

An interpreter who desires not to contest or defend himself/herself against an allegation of unethical conduct may at any time voluntarily resign his or her certification in lieu of further disciplinary proceedings. The allegations against the interpreter are presumed to have been proven for purposes of considering reinstatement.

Upon receipt and review of the Board's recommendation, the Director will issue a final determination as to whether the interpreter committed any of the actions described in this section. A written letter shall be sent to the interpreter with the decision along with all supporting material that the Board or the Director may have considered in making their decision. The complainant will receive a copy of the decision letter. In cases where a private reprimand is issued, the complainant will receive a decision letter informing him/her that a private reprimand was issued against the interpreter.



The Board retains jurisdiction and may request that the sanctioned interpreter follow-up with the Board to report completion of the requirements stated in the decision letter. The Board may issue a letter to the interpreter acknowledging satisfactory completion of the requirements. If the requirements have not been completed to the Board's satisfaction, the Board may issue a recommendation to the Director as to possible additional sanctions.

### **c. Possible Sanctions**

Possible sanctions the Board and the Director may consider include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:

- A suspension from the Registry of interpreters eligible to work in court;
- A requirement that work be supervised or monitored over a period of time;
- A suspension of certification for a specified period of time;
- Permanent revocation of certification;
- A refusal to confer certification to a non-certified interpreter for a specified period of time or under certain circumstances, permanently;
- Private or public reprimand;
- Restitution;
- A requirement that specified education courses be taken;
- A requirement that one or more parts of the oral certification examination be retaken;
- Denial of state reimbursement to county or counties where interpreter's services are used for a specific period of time or under certain circumstances, permanently;
- Notice to the affected court for possible contempt action; or
- Referral to law enforcement or district attorney for prosecution where appropriate.

The specific disciplinary action and the degree of discipline to be imposed should depend upon factors such as the seriousness of the violation, the effect of the improper activity on others or on the judicial system, and the existence of aggravating or mitigating factors.

Aggravating factors may include prior disciplinary action against the same interpreter; intentional, premeditated, knowing, grossly incompetent or grossly negligent act; bad faith or obstruction; a pattern of misconduct, multiple offenses; failure to cooperate during the disciplinary proceeding; refusal to acknowledge conduct; vulnerability of victim; or illegality of conduct.

Mitigating factors may include absence of prior disciplinary action; good faith effort to rectify consequences of misconduct; nature of conduct and likelihood of reoccurrence; isolation of event; experience as an interpreter; implementation of remedial measures to

mitigate harm or risk of harm; self-reporting; voluntary admission of violation; or temporary circumstances outside of interpreter's control.

#### **d. Reinstatement by the Director**

A court interpreter whose certification or Registry status has been suspended or revoked may apply in writing to the AOIC Director for reinstatement pursuant to any timeframes established in the final decision. This request shall explain why the applicant believes reinstatement should occur. The Director shall have the sole discretion whether to grant or deny reinstatement or to impose conditions upon reinstatement as deemed appropriate.

#### **e. Notification to Courts and Duty to Self-Report**

If an interpreter has been disciplined for an ethical violation, the Board may notify all clerks of circuit courts of the results. The Board may also notify municipal courts, federal courts or any other agency deemed appropriate by the Director of the results.

An interpreter who has been sanctioned for discipline by the Director has a duty to report the disciplinary outcome within 30 days of the imposition of the sanctions to all other jurisdictions where the interpreter's certification may be recognized. Failure to self-report may be considered by the Director when determining if reinstatement is appropriate.

### **6. Reciprocity**

The Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) offers reciprocity to foreign language interpreters that have passed certain written and oral proficiency examinations. Interpreters who have completed any of the following requirements are eligible to be listed on the AOIC Registry of interpreters as either registered, qualified or certified (provided other program requirements have been met):

- Attendance at a two-day or 14-hour orientation which included ethics training and skill-building AND passage of the National Center for State Courts' (NCSC) written examination in another state or territory with a score of 80% or higher;
- For certified status: Passage of the NCSC oral examination in another state or territory with a score of 70% or higher on each section (Sight Translation, Consecutive and Simultaneous);
- Letter of Good Standing from the Reciprocity State
- For registered status: Passage of the NCSC oral examination in another state or territory with a score of 60% or higher on each section (Sight Translation, Consecutive and Simultaneous)
- For qualified status: Passage of an oral proficiency interview with the highest score
- Passage of the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE); or

- Passage of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) examination.

To apply for reciprocity, the candidate must submit an “Application for Reciprocity.” The application can be found on the Language Access Program page of the Illinois Courts [website](#).

In addition to submitting this application, the candidate must send the AOIC proof of passing one of the examinations listed above.

- For the NCSC written examination, the candidate must submit proof of attendance at a two-day or 14-hour orientation and proof of written examination scores on official letterhead from the state for which they currently possess credentials. Attendance at the two-day AOIC orientation will only be waived if the candidate attended another state's orientation and passed the written NCSC exam.
- For the NCSC oral examination, the candidate must submit proof of oral performance examination scores from the state for which they currently possess credentials. A copy of the rater evaluation form must also accompany the supporting documentation for passage of the oral NCSC examination.
- For the FCICE or NAJIT examination, the candidate must submit proof of passing the examination on official letterhead from the entity for which they currently possess credentials.

If tentatively approved for reciprocity for the NCSC oral examination, the FCICE examination or NAJIT examination, then the candidate will have to 1) successfully pass a criminal background check and 2) submit a signed interpreter oath of office.

Certified interpreters granted reciprocity are required to submit a verification form by January 1 every even-numbered year affirming they remain in good standing in the state(s) in which they passed their written and oral proficiency examinations. For the purposes of this verification, good standing means the interpreter has not committed any ethical violations or violations of the state's code of interpreter ethics. The verification form can be found on the [Language Access Program page](#) of the Illinois Courts website. Failure to verify good standing by the reporting period deadline will initiate a review by the Language Access Advisory Board.

If the interpreter is not in good standing, they have six months to provide proof of their reinstatement in the certifying state(s). If not reinstated, their status will be reviewed by the Language Access Advisory Board.

## **7. Interpreter Identification**

All Illinois certified and qualified interpreters will be issued identification consisting of a badge showing the interpreter's status as a certified interpreter. Certified and qualified interpreters who are working in any court are required to always wear this identification and must abide by the terms and conditions associated with the identification established by the AOIC. If an interpreter's certification is revoked or suspended at any time, the interpreter must return the badge to the AOIC for the duration of the revocation or suspension period.

## **8. Confidentiality of Test Materials and Test Scores**

Written and oral test materials are used under the terms of an agreement with the Council, and may be released only to authorized test administrators. The AOIC Senior Program Manager, Language Access is responsible for maintaining the security of test materials, answers, and grading information.

Written and oral test scores of individual interpreters are maintained internally and are not available to the public. Test scores of individual interpreters may be shared by the Senior Program Manager, Language Access with an appropriate court official or any Council representative to evaluate interpreter qualifications for purposes of hiring, training or testing. The confidentiality of this information must be maintained by the court official or Council representative with whom it is shared. Statistical information in the aggregate relating to the test may be released at the discretion of the AOIC.

## **9. Oath of Office**

Sign language and foreign language interpreters who wish to be listed on the Registry must sign and return an oath of office form which states that the interpreter "will interpret accurately, completely, and impartially, in accordance with the standards prescribed by law, the Illinois Code of Interpreter Ethics for court interpreters, and Illinois guidelines for court interpreting."

## Appendix A: Documentation of Accommodation for the Court Interpreter Written Exam

This document must be completed by an appropriate professional (doctor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or education professional) to certify that the applicant requires an exam accommodation. If there is existing and current documentation of having the same or similar accommodation provided to the applicant in another test situation, it may be submitted instead of having this portion of the form completed.

### Written Exam Description

The court interpreter written exam is designed to test a candidate's level of English vocabulary, familiarity with legal terminology, and application of interpreter professional standards. There are 135 multiple-choice questions on the exam. All questions and answers are in English. The questions are typed in 12-point Times New Roman font. To record answers, candidates will be required to either fill in a "bubble sheet" or circle the correct answers on an answer key. Candidates are given two hours and fifteen minutes to complete the exam. Restroom breaks are permitted during the exam but are controlled so that a limited number of candidates are outside the testing room at the same time.

For questions about exam content and conditions, please contact Noor Alawawda at [nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov).

### PROFESSIONAL'S DECLARATION

I HAVE KNOWN \_\_\_\_\_ SINCE \_\_\_\_\_  
(Provide Applicant's Name)

(Date)

AS A \_\_\_\_\_  
(Patient or Other Professional Relationship)

I HAVE DIAGNOSED OR EVALUATED THE APPLICANT MYSELF AND I AM NOT RELYING UPON

FACTS RELATED TO ME BY THE APPLICANT.

MY DIAGNOSIS IS \_\_\_\_\_  
(Describe Medical or Other Condition)

THE APPLICANT'S FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS DUE TO THE DISABILITY THAT REQUIRE AN ACCOMMODATION ARE: \_\_\_\_\_

I HAVE REVIEWED THE EXAM DESCRIPTION. IT IS MY PROFESSIONAL OPINION THAT BECAUSE OF THE APPLICANT'S DISABILITY, HE/SHE SHOULD BE ACCOMMODATED BY PROVIDING THE FOLLOWING:

- ☐ Large print type (provide font size and/or font type\_\_\_\_\_)
- ☐ An alternate testing area (describe\_\_\_\_\_)
- ☐ Extra time (specify how much time\_\_\_\_\_)
- ☐ A reader
- ☐ Other accommodation (describe\_\_\_\_\_)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF THE  
 PROFESSIONAL: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE OF THE  
 PROFESSIONAL: \_\_\_\_\_

PRINTED NAME OF THE  
 PROFESSIONAL: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE  
 NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the original of this completed form at your earliest convenience to:

*Senior Program Manager, Language Access  
 Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts  
 222 N LaSalle St., 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
 Chicago, IL 60601  
 nalaawdar@illinoiscourts.gov*

## Appendix B: Documentation of Accommodation for the Court Interpreter Oral Exam

This document must be completed by an appropriate professional (doctor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or education professional) to certify that the applicant's disabling condition requires an exam accommodation. If there is existing and current documentation of having the same or similar accommodation provided to the applicant in another test situation, it may be submitted instead of having this portion of the form completed.

### Oral Exam Description

The court interpreter oral certification exam is designed to determine whether test-takers possess the minimum levels of language knowledge and fluency in both languages, and the ability to successfully render meaning from one language into another in each of the three modes of interpreting that are required of court interpreters. The three modes of interpreting are:

- Sight translation of documents;
- Consecutive interpreting; and
- Simultaneous interpreting.

Each portion of the exam is administered as follows:

**Sight Translation:** This part of the test simulates an interpreter reading (1) an English document aloud into the non-English language, and (2) a non-English document into English. Each of the two documents is approximately 225 words in length. After instructions are given, the candidate is allowed six minutes to complete the English document, and six minutes to complete the non-English document. The candidate's oral renditions are digitally recorded.

**Consecutive Interpreting:** This mode is the appropriate form of interpreting for non-English speaking witnesses, and other question-answer situations. During this portion of the test, the test taker listens to an audio recording at normal conversational pace, and interprets English language questions (segments) into the foreign language, and foreign language answers (segments) into English. The test taker may ask to have two of the segments repeated. Candidates are encouraged to take notes to assist their memory. The consecutive script is 850-950 words in length. The test taker is given approximately 20 minutes to complete this portion of the exam, but the precise time may depend on the language and the actual number of words in the test version. The test taker's oral renditions are digitally recorded.

**Simultaneous Interpreting:** Simultaneous interpreting occurs when a person interprets what someone is saying at the same time they are saying it. This mode is the appropriate form of interpreting for many situations interpreters encounter in the courtroom, for example, interpreting for defendants during hearings and trials. This part of the exam consists of a recording of a simulated attorney's opening or closing statement to a judge or jury. It is approximately 800 to 850 words in length, is recorded at an approximate speed of 120 words per minute and is approximately seven minutes long. The test taker listens to the prerecorded English passage through earphones and, while listening, interprets aloud into the non-English language. The test takers' oral renditions are digitally recorded.

**Standard Testing Conditions:** The exam is given in its entirety, and typically takes less than one hour to complete. The exam is typically administered in a meeting or small conference room, and the test taker will take the exam in the presence of only one Proctor.  
For questions about exam content and conditions, please contact Noor Alawawda at 217-208-3327 or nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov.

### PROFESSIONAL'S DECLARATION

I HAVE KNOWN \_\_\_\_\_ SINCE \_\_\_\_\_  
(Provide Applicant's Name)

(Date)

AS A \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Patient or Other Professional Relationship)

I HAVE DIAGNOSED OR EVALUATED THE APPLICANT MYSELF AND I AM NOT RELYING UPON  
FACTS RELATED TO ME BY THE APPLICANT.

MY DIAGNOSIS IS \_\_\_\_\_  
(Describe Medical or Other Condition)

THE APPLICANT'S FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS DUE TO THE DISABILITY THAT REQUIRE  
ACCOMMODATION ARE: \_\_\_\_\_

I HAVE REVIEWED THE EXAM DESCRIPTION. IT IS MY PROFESSIONAL OPINION THAT  
BECAUSE OF THE APPLICANT'S DISABILITY, HE/SHE SHOULD BE ACCOMMODATED BY  
PROVIDING THE FOLLOWING:

- ☐ Large print type (provide font size and/or font type \_\_\_\_\_)
- ☐ An alternate testing area (describe \_\_\_\_\_)
- ☐ Extra time (specify how much time \_\_\_\_\_)
- ☐ A reader
- ☐ Other accommodation (describe \_\_\_\_\_)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF THE  
PROFESSIONAL: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE OF THE  
PROFESSIONAL: \_\_\_\_\_



PRINTED NAME OF THE

PROFESSIONAL: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE

NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return the original of this completed form at your earliest convenience to:

*Senior Program Manager, Language Access*  
*Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts*  
222 N LaSalle St., 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago, IL 60601  
[nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov)

## Appendix C: Oral Exam Cancellation Policy

### Oral Exam Cancellation Policy

We encourage all candidates to carefully consider their availability and ensure they are fully prepared and committed to taking the exam before registering for an oral examination. Please note that the number of candidates allowed to take an exam on any given date is very limited. If you encounter an unforeseen circumstance that requires you to change your registration, please be aware of the following cancellation policy: Cancellation requests must be submitted in writing via email to [nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:nalawawda@illinoiscourts.gov) and [dksiazek@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:dksiazek@illinoiscourts.gov). You will receive a confirmation email acknowledging your cancellation within three (3) business days of receipt.

#### 1. Cancellations Within Three Weeks (15 Business Days) of the Exam

- If you cancel your exam within three weeks (15 business days) of the scheduled exam date, a \$50 processing fee will be assessed.
- You will receive a full refund, but you **must pay the \$50 cancellation fee** before being eligible to register for another oral exam date or skill-building course.
- This policy applies to all candidates, including AOIC scholarship recipients. Scholarship recipients are responsible for covering the \$50 cancellation fee.

#### 2. Cancellations More Than Three Weeks Before the Exam

- If you cancel more than three weeks before the exam date, you have a **one-time** option to transfer your registration fee to a future oral exam date.
- If you do not wish to transfer your fee, a full refund will be issued within 3-5 business days. **Note:** The original payment card must be active for the refund to be processed. If the associated bank account is closed, the AOIC cannot issue refunds, as checks are not provided.

#### 3. Frequent Cancellations

- Candidates who cancel and reschedule their oral exam more than once, even with more than three weeks' notice to the AOIC, will incur a \$100 fee for each additional cancellation.
- Scholarship recipients who cancel and reschedule their oral exam more than once, even with more than three weeks' notice to the AOIC, will incur a \$100 fee for each additional cancellation. The scholarship does not cover that fee.

#### 4. Emergency Cancellations

- We understand that emergencies happen. If you need to cancel due to an emergency (e.g. accident, sudden illness, family emergency), please inform us via email as soon as

possible. In such cases, the cancellation fee may be waived at our discretion, provided appropriate documentation is submitted if requested.

## **5. No-Shows**

- Failure to attend a scheduled oral exam without prior notice will be considered a 'no-show' and may result in the full exam fee being charged, with no refund issued, except in emergency cases as specified above.