



Judicial Council of California

---

**COURT INTERPRETERS ADVISORY PANEL  
MINUTES OF OPEN MEETING**

---

May 13, 2026

12:15 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.

Virtual

**Members Present:** Hon. Maurice Sanchez. (Chair), Ms. Anabel Romero (Vice-Chair), Mr. Hany Farag, Mr. Bryan Kritzeck, Ms. Luisa Mc-Ewan, Mr. José Navarrete, Ms. Anabel Romero, Ms. Bonnie Faye Gibson-Brydon, Hon. Tamara Hall, Ms. Jennifer De La Cruz, Ms. Angie Birchfield, Ms. Shirley Luo, Ms. Stephanie Cameron

**Members Absent:** Hon. Michael P. Pulos, Ms. Mary Ma

**Others Present:** Mr. Ray Mata, Ms. Angela De Leon, Mr. Douglas Denton, Mr. Russell McGregor

---

**OPEN MEETING**

---

**Call to Order and Roll Call**

The chair called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. and took roll call.

**Approval of Minutes**

The advisory body reviewed and approved the minutes of the October 15, 2025, Court Interpreters Advisory Panel meeting.

---

**DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS (ITEMS 2-2)**

---

**Item 1**

**Review draft Invitation to Comment on proposed amendments to Credential Review Procedures (Action Required)**

Mr. Ray Mata, Analyst, Court Interpreters Program, gave a presentation on a proposed Invitation to Comment (ITC) on proposed amendments to the *California Court Interpreter Credential Review Procedures*. The proposal establishes a standardized process for evaluating skills-based complaints and authorizes disciplinary letters as an intermediate corrective action to improve the consistency and fairness of complaint resolution.

**Action:** The voting members of CIAP unanimously approved the proposed Invitation to Comment (ITC) to circulate for public comment.

**Item 2**

**Potential Recognition of Persons with American Sign Language (ASL) Generalist Credentials to Perform Work in the Courts (Action Required)**

Mr. Russell McGregor, Senior Analyst, Language Access Implementation Unit, gave a presentation on a revised strategy to address the shortage of certified ASL court interpreters, based on feedback received from the public and the Interpreter Language Access Subcommittee (ILAS). The strategy includes conducting a limited Pilot Program for ASL Generalist Interpreters to assist with developing guidelines.

**Action:** The voting members of CIAP unanimously approved the proposed pilot recommendations, which will be developed in a report for Judicial Council approval.

---

**ADJOURNMENT**

---

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

Approved by the advisory body on enter date.

DRAFT

# Addressing California's Court Interpreter Shortage: Policy Innovations in Certification Testing

Enhancing Access to Justice Through Revised Interpreter Examination Policies

## Executive Summary

California's courts are facing a persistent shortage of qualified spoken-language interpreters, which directly impacts access to justice for the state's diverse population. This discussion paper examines a proposed policy change to the California court interpreter certification process: introducing a carryover score system for the Bilingual Interpreting Examination (BIE). The BIE is the certification exam for court interpreters of California's major spoken languages. Under the proposed system, candidates who pass two or more sections of the four-part BIE (also known as the Oral Examination by the National Center for State Courts, or NCSC) would be allowed to retain those passing scores for up to two years. This change would enable candidates to focus on passing the remaining sections within that period. The policy would also be applied retroactively on a one-time basis, enabling candidates who have been in the pipeline for several years to benefit from the change.

Additional innovations for consideration include: 1) requiring candidates to complete an orientation program prior to taking interpreter examinations, and 2) implementing a language proficiency screening requirement—such as an Oral Proficiency Examination (OPE)—to assess candidates' oral proficiency in the language in which they will interpret before they are eligible to take the BIE. These initiatives could improve overall testing outcomes, enhance program efficiency, and better prepare candidates for the examination process. Collectively, these potential policy revisions are designed to support candidate success, address the interpreter shortage, and uphold high professional standards within the interpreter profession.

## Background: Court Interpreter Certification in California

The Judicial Council of California assumed responsibility for certifying and registering court interpreters in 1993, establishing rigorous testing and scoring standards. Since the 2010s, candidates seeking certification were required to achieve a minimum score of 70% on all four sections of the BIE—simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting, sight translation from English to the target language, and sight translation from the target language to English—in a single sitting.

To obtain certified court interpreter status in a major spoken language, individuals must first pass the Written Examination in English with a score of 80% or higher, which is required to advance to the oral examination phase. They must then pass the Bilingual Interpreter Exam (BIE) for their respective spoken certified language and enroll with the Judicial Council to be included on the Judicial Council [Master List of Certified and Registered Court Interpreters](#).

The BIE is an oral exam that is administered in the following California certified spoken languages: Arabic (Egyptian/Levantine), Armenian (Eastern), Cantonese, Farsi (Persian), Filipino (Tagalog), Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjabi (India), Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The BIE is maintained by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) for several major languages, including nine of California’s certified languages. The exams are accessible to states that pay annual dues to the NCSC, which provides access to a national exam bank for participating states. In California, the NCSC BIEs have been supplemented by similar exams created for Spanish and other languages unique to our state (e.g., Armenian (Eastern), Farsi (Persian), and Punjabi (India)).

**The Workforce Crisis and Recruitment Efforts**

The *California Court Interpreter Workforce Study* (December 2025) found that approximately 33% of credentialed interpreters are at retirement age (65+), threatening service continuity ([Workforce Study, 2026, p. 27](#)). To address this looming crisis, the council’s Language Access Services Program has initiated recruitment, retention and credentialing strategies, including but not limited to:

- Free exam preparation and specialized—skills building—development training courses, which include educational resources.
- Initiating the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program where participants receive financial support for educational training and exam fees, and in return, must work in the courts for at least three years after successfully passing all required exams.
- Modernized testing processes.
- Alternative credentialing models, including carryover testing scores and potential tiered certification systems; and
- Multimedia outreach endeavors, including a centralized jobs board.

**Challenges in the Interpreter Certification Pipeline**

The BIE is recognized for its high level of difficulty. Candidates are required to demonstrate advanced oral bilingual proficiency, mastery of legal terminology, and strong real-time interpreting skills. They must be able to interpret rapid speech and various language registers, which contributes to consistently low pass rates. Recent data highlights the low overall pass rate and significant challenge of passing the BIE without additional training (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Number of Candidate Passers of BIE (Required for Qualification as Certified Interpreter)**

Description	Testing Year 2023	Testing Year 2024	Testing Year 2025	Testing Year 2026 (to date)
Total number of BIE takers	322	404	472	201
Overall pass rate	9% (31/323)	8% (32/403)	8% (39/472)	5% (9/201)

Table 2 shows the number of individuals who took the near-passer training and then went on to retake the BIE, showing a significant improvement in overall passage rates.

**Table 2. Number of Near-Passer Candidates Passing the BIE**

Description	Testing Year 2023	Testing Year 2024	Testing Year 2025	Testing Year 2026 (to date)
Total number of near-passers who took the BIE and the near passer training	41	40	44	26
Total number of near-passers who took the training and passed the BIE <b>within 12 months</b> of training completion	10	8	14	<b>0</b>
Total number of near-passers who took the training and passed the BIE <b>after 12 months</b> taking the near passer training.	2	3	5	<b>n/a</b>
<b>Overall Near-Passer BIE Pass Rate (%)</b>	<b>29%</b> (12/41)	<b>28%</b> (11/40)	<b>43%</b> (19/44)	<b>n/a</b>

**Note:** Although the table displays the year in which candidates took or passed the BIE, individual near-passer candidates may have completed the training in a prior year.

For the Spring 2026 BIE, none of the near-passer candidates successfully passed the exam; additional testing opportunities will be available in Fall 2026. However, exam results indicate that 17 candidates who took the near-passer training (accounting for 9% of the testing pool) came within 1–3 percentage points of passing all four sections.

California, Nevada, Arkansas, and most other states require candidates to achieve a score of 70 percent or higher on each examination section, or meet an overall passing threshold, depending on the jurisdiction. Several states—including Arizona, Minnesota, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island—permit candidates to carry forward passing section scores, eliminating the requirement to pass all sections during a single examination administration.

This policy difference has important implications for candidate success. The data in Table 3 below illustrate that a substantial number of candidates could benefit from a carryover score policy implementation, which would support targeted skill development, and contribute to higher certification rates within a two-year period. Additionally, the table provides a detailed breakdown, by language, of candidates who came close to passing during the three-year period from 2023 through 2025. It is important to note that these results may have occurred at any point within the reporting period and do not necessarily reflect outcomes from a single testing event.

Table 3 presents the number of unique candidates, categorized by language, who may be eligible for carryover scores after passing two or more sections with scores of 70% or higher during 2023–2025. If carryover scores are applied retroactively, on a one-time basis, these candidates would have two years from the implementation date to pass the remaining sections. This policy

would encourage candidates to complete the remaining exam sections and would help expand the interpreter pool more quickly.

**Table 3. Candidate Performance by Language and Sections Passed (2023–2025)**

Language	# Candidates	Passed ≥2 Sections	Passed ≥3 Sections
Arabic (Egyptian)	8	4	1
Arabic (Levantine)	3	2	1
Cantonese	11	4	3
Farsi	20	3	1
Korean	17	2	1
Mandarin	70	22	8
Portuguese	4	1	0
Punjabi (India)	7	1	0
Russian	22	14	6
Spanish	477	186	79
Filipino (Tagalog)	6	3	0
Vietnamese	6	1	0
<b>subtotal:</b>	651	243	100

**Policy Innovation: Carryover Scores for BIE Sections**

Under a carryover score system, candidates who pass two or more sections of the BIE may retain those scores for up to two years. This policy could be applied retroactively to the candidates who achieved two or more qualifying scores since 2023 (see Table 3). For retroactive candidates who complete all four sections within a two-year period from the date of implementation, they could be considered for credentialing, contingent upon their acceptance and availability of court employment for a minimum of three years, similar to the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program. Once the policy takes effect, these candidates would need to complete the remaining sections within two years or sooner to earn certification. This approach enables candidates to focus on areas needing improvement, such as simultaneous interpreting, while reducing retesting costs and stress. Making the policy retroactive, on a one-time basis for eligible candidates as reflected in Table 3 will also help courts fill court interpreter employee vacancies.

Although passage of the BIE may be achieved over a longer period (rather than in a single sitting), maintaining the requirement to achieve a minimum score of 70 percent in each section ensures that courtroom interpreting standards remain rigorous. By acknowledging partial achievement and promoting targeted skill development, California’s courts may help address the BIE's low passage rate, increase the number of certified interpreters, and enhance language access for court users.

**Other Potential Testing Innovations**

To further uphold the high standards of interpreter services in California's courts, two other measures are proposed for consideration: 1) requiring candidates to complete an orientation prior

to taking interpreter examinations, and 2) implementing a language proficiency screener, such as an Oral Proficiency Examination (OPE), before candidates sit for the BIE. These steps may enhance overall testing outcomes and improve program efficiency.

It is important to note that orientation programs provide candidates with essential information regarding the role of court interpreters, interpreter ethics, court procedures, examination content, and performance expectations enabling them to make informed decisions before investing time and effort, and resources in the testing process. Similarly, a language proficiency screener can help identify whether candidates possess the minimum bilingual language skills necessary to successfully pass the BIE. Several states already use the OPE as a screening tool and require candidates to achieve a specified proficiency level, such as Advanced High, before advancing in the credentialing process. California will need to determine the appropriate proficiency benchmark if it elects to adopt a similar screening requirement.

For example, Delaware requires candidates to attend a mandatory orientation seminar before registering for the written examination, while Washington and Nevada require completion of orientation training before candidates may advance to oral testing. Other states, including Utah, Tennessee, Arkansas, Arizona, and California for certain registered-language pathways, utilize Oral Proficiency Examinations or similar proficiency assessments to evaluate language competency before candidates proceed to more advanced credentialing examinations. These measures could help candidates make informed decisions about their readiness, encourage targeted preparation, reduce unsuccessful examination attempts, and ensure that testing resources are focused on candidates who have already demonstrated foundational knowledge and language proficiency.

### **Implementation Considerations**

No significant fiscal impact is anticipated for trial courts or the Judicial Council. For carryover scores, the Court Interpreters Program (CIP) will collaborate with testing vendors to administer individual BIE sections, set appropriate pricing, and update tracking and communication systems. CIP will ensure that candidates are informed of the new policy and their eligibility for score carryover. Other innovations, such as requiring orientation before taking the examinations and using an OPE screener before sitting for the BIE, would also constitute testing policy changes and require development of the orientation program and communication to candidates regarding the BIE screener requirement.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

California's move to allow carryover scores for the BIE and other testing innovations would reflect a commitment to both maintaining rigorous standards and addressing workforce shortages. By enabling candidates to focus on skill development and recognizing incremental achievement, the policy changes would support recruitment, retention, and quality improvement. It is recommended that in addition to consideration of carryover scores, the Judicial Council continue to monitor outcomes and consider further innovations at a later date, if necessary, such as tiered credentialing, to ensure robust interpreter services statewide.

**Prepared by:** Douglas G. Denton and Juan Palomares, Judicial Council Language Access Services, for the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel (June 2026)

**References**

- [Become a Court Interpreter](#) (Judicial Council resources for candidates)
- [California Court Interpreter Jobs](#)
- [California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program](#)
- [California Court Interpreter Workforce Study](#) (December 2025)