JUDICIAL COUNCIL *of* CALIFORNIA

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HON. PATRICIA GUERRERO
Chief Justice of California
Chair of the Judicial Council

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Chair, Executive and Planning Committee

HON. STACY BOULWARE EURIE
Chair, Legislation Committee

HON. JOAN K. IRION
Chair, Rules Committee

HON. MARIA D. HERNANDEZ
Chair, Technology Committee

HON. ANN C. MOORMAN
Chair, Judicial Branch Budget Committee
Chair, Litigation Management Committee

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December 17, 2025

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Legislative Counsel
1021 O Street, Suite 3210
Sacramento, California 95814

Ms. Erika Contreras
Secretary of the Senate
State Capitol, Room 305
Sacramento, California 95814

Ms. Sue Parker
Chief Clerk of the Assembly
State Capitol, Room 319
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: *California Court Interpreter Workforce Study*, as required under Government Code section 71900

Dear Ms. Jenkins, Ms. Contreras, and Ms. Parker:

Under Government Code section 71900, the Judicial Council is submitting the *California Court Interpreter Workforce Study.*

If you have any questions related to this report, please contact Mr. Douglas G. Denton, principal manager, Language Access Services, at 415-865-7870 or douglas.denton@jud.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Michelle Curran
Administrative Director
Judicial Council

MC/DGD
Enclosures
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Emelyn Rodriguez, General Counsel, Office of Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas
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MS. MICHELLE CURRAN
Administrative Director
Judicial Council

Report title: *California Court Interpreter Workforce Study*

Statutory citation: Government Code section 71900

Date of report: December 2025

The following summary of the report is provided under the requirements of Government Code section 9795.

This policy study examines the challenges and opportunities related to the recruitment, retention, and development of court interpreters in California. Drawing from both quantitative data and qualitative input from focus groups and interviews with stakeholders, the study highlights critical gaps in meeting the language access needs of limited-English-proficient (LEP) court users and compliance with legal mandates.

The study's findings call for action to ensure adequate interpreter services are available to meet the needs of the state's nearly 6.4 million LEP residents and potential court users. Key findings reveal that while Spanish interpreter needs are generally met, significant shortages persist in other languages due to factors such as difficulty in passing the required court interpreter examinations, a retiring workforce, geographic constraints, and competition from other industries. While California's court interpreter salaries are nationally competitive, they remain below federal levels, leading to requests from stakeholders for increased compensation, as funding allows. The study also identifies underuse of video remote interpreting (VRI) technology, recommending its expanded use to address statewide interpreter shortages.

Recommendations for the Legislature include continued funding and support for interpreter services, extension and expansion of workforce pilot programs, legislative adjustments to improve access to qualified interpreters, and promotion of interpreter career pathways through education and outreach.

The full report can be accessed at *courts.ca.gov/news-reference/reports-publications/reports-legislature*. A printed copy of the report may be obtained by calling 415-865-7870.

December 2025

California Court Interpreter Workforce Study

As required under AB 1032 (2023)

Judicial Council of California
455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, California 94102-3688
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The *California Court Interpreter Workforce Study* was approved by the Judicial Council on December 12, 2025. It was prepared under the direction of the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel.

For electronic copies of this report and for more information, visit
https://languageaccess.courts.ca.gov/about/studies-and-reports.

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California Court Interpreter Workforce Study

Introduction and Key Findings

Executive Summary

This policy study examines the challenges and opportunities related to the recruitment, retention, and development of court interpreters in California. Drawing from both quantitative data and qualitative input from focus groups and interviews with stakeholders, the study highlights (1) critical gaps in meeting the language access needs of court users who are limited-English-proficient (LEP), deaf, or hard of hearing; and (2) compliance with legal mandates.

Key findings reveal that while Spanish interpreter needs are generally met, significant shortages persist in other languages due to factors such as difficulty in passing the required court interpreter examinations, a retiring workforce, geographic constraints, and competition from other industries. Although California's court interpreter salaries are nationally competitive, they remain below federal levels, leading to calls from stakeholders for increased compensation to enhance recruitment and retention. The study also identifies underutilization of video remote interpreting (VRI) technology and recommends its expanded use to address statewide interpreter shortages.

Recommendations to the Legislature include continued funding and support for interpreter services, extension and expansion of workforce pilot programs, legislative adjustments to improve access to qualified interpreters, and promotion of interpreter career pathways through education and outreach.

It is also recommended that the Judicial Council review examination standards and content, adopting carryover scoring to aid candidates, creating structured career pathways—including tiered systems and apprenticeship programs, particularly for Spanish interpreters—and developing resources such as a statewide VRI-trained interpreter directory. Expanding access to American Sign Language (ASL) and emerging languages like Hindi, Mixteco Alto, and Mam also remains a priority.

Courts are encouraged to collaborate with the council on establishing a pool of VRI-ready interpreters, regularly review and improve compensation packages, develop staff with remote skills, leverage technology for coverage, and engage in active recruitment and mentorship efforts to support aspiring interpreters. Credentialed court interpreters are encouraged to engage by serving as a mentor to help aspiring candidates achieve certified or registered court interpreter status.

Together, these recommendations and considerations aim to strengthen California's court interpreter workforce to serve the public, ensuring equitable access to justice for all court users regardless of language.

Purpose

Per Assembly Bill 1032 (Pacheco; Stats. 2023, ch. 556), approved by the Governor in October 2023, the Judicial Council is required to conduct a court interpreter workforce study by January 1, 2026. Government Code section 71900 states:

> (a) On or before January 1, 2026, the Judicial Council shall conduct a court interpreter workforce study and provide recommendations to the Legislature regarding court interpreter availability and the future court interpreter workforce.
>
> (b) The Judicial Council shall work in collaboration with key stakeholder groups, including exclusively recognized employee organizations representing court interpreters and trade associations representing independent court interpreters.
>
> (c) The report to be submitted pursuant to this section shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795.

Findings

The following findings are based on both quantitative data and qualitative input from this study:

1. Data and focus group findings indicate that California courts face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified court interpreters to meet the needs of limited-English-proficient (LEP), deaf, and hard of hearing court users, and in complying with legal requirements.

2. Challenges consistently identified in both the data and participant feedback include a retiring workforce; an insufficient number of interpreters in certain languages; geographic constraints; reluctance among independent contractors to accept employee positions (full-time or part-time); difficulty in passing required examinations; and competition from other industries, such as medical and private sector employers.

3. While the need for Spanish interpretation is generally met, data and focus group findings indicate persistent shortages of qualified interpreters for languages other than Spanish.

4. Data shows that California's salaries for court interpreter employees are competitive at the national level but remain below the federal rate for both employees and contractors.

5. Salary ranges for California court interpreter employees are generally higher than in most states. Employees receive significant financial benefits like medical, dental, and vision coverage; paid holidays; and retirement plans, all of which are less common for freelance interpreters in the private sector.

6. Study participants emphasized that increasing compensation is critical to remaining competitive.

7. Court leadership recommends tiered certification, particularly for Spanish, to address statewide staffing shortages and anticipated retirements, allowing interpreters to handle simpler cases before advancing to more complex ones.

8. Labor representatives advocate for structured mentorship, practical preparatory courses, and flexible retesting options for specific exam components, which maintain quality while reducing unnecessary repetition.

9. Data and participant input indicate that video remote interpreting (VRI) is currently underutilized in California courts.

10. Stakeholders recommend greater use of VRI to help address statewide shortages of interpreters, particularly for languages other than Spanish.

11. Data indicates that the Judicial Council's near-passer training program has been effective in increasing passage rates for the Bilingual Interpreting Examination (BIE).

12. Aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters reported at times feeling a generational disconnect with more experienced interpreters. They expressed a need for increased mentorship, greater consistency in training approaches, and the use of supportive tools, such as carryover scores, to help them pass the BIE.

Recommendations for Legislature

The following recommendations to the Legislature are based on the study findings:

1. Maintain support for Government Code section 68092.1, enacted in 2015, which affirms the joint commitment of the legislative and judicial branches to provide interpreters to all parties who require one, regardless of case type or income level.

2. Maintain and support funding for court interpreter services in California courts, including augmentations to the annual appropriation for the Trial Court Trust Fund, Court Interpreters Program, as needed.

3. Prior to the program's conclusion, and upon consideration of findings from the Judicial Council, consider extending funding for the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program (set to expire June 30, 2029). This extension should include increased administrative resources to allow additional Judicial Council staffing and permit more than 10 participants per court per year.

4. Consider legislation to remove the "100-day rule" (Gov. Code, § 71802(c)(2)), or at least limit its application to Spanish, to improve local access to qualified contract interpreters.

5. Consider legislation or funding to support the development of higher education curricula for court interpreters, with an emphasis on the skills and knowledge required for court work, including training on remote interpreting.

6. Support local and statewide programs that sponsor candidates' court interpreter training in exchange for a minimum of three years of service in the courts.

Considerations for Judicial Council

The following considerations for the Judicial Council are based on the study findings:[1]

1. Permit carryover scores for candidates who pass two or more sections of the four-part BIE, allowing those scores to remain valid for up to two years.

2. Create a multitiered system for Spanish (and other languages as appropriate) to help candidates progressively build skills for the state's most in-demand language, and partner with courts and interpreters to develop apprenticeship and mentorship programs.

3. Review interpreter examinations for certified languages to ensure the content reflects current court practices and vocabulary, and that passing is reasonably attainable for candidates who have studied and prepared for their chosen language.

4. Conduct a cut score study (also known as a standard-setting study) to determine the minimum passing score for the various California court interpreter examinations, ensuring the exams meet program needs and address statewide interpreter shortages.

5. Continue efforts to expand access to American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters.

6. Collaborate with providers of languages other than Spanish and emerging languages, including relay interpreters, to identify and address training needs.

7. Partner with courts to create remote staffing tools, such as a statewide directory of interpreters trained in video remote interpreting (VRI) who are available to cover last-minute needs.

8. Review suggestions from aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters gathered in this study to identify potentially actionable items that would improve training, support, and resources.

9. Use interpreter usage data and dashboards to develop targeted recruitment efforts for languages where there is a shortage of certified and registered court interpreters.

[1] Some of the considerations for the council may require extra resources to implement. These resource needs were not evaluated as part of these considerations. If additional funding or staffing is necessary for implementation, the council will prepare a funding request through the Budget Change Proposal process.

Considerations for Courts

The following considerations for the courts are based on the study findings:[2]

1. Collaborate with the Judicial Council to establish a pool of VRI–ready interpreters who have completed training and are proficient in using commonly employed VRI platforms.

2. Encourage VRI skills for newly hired interpreter employees, and incorporate remote interpreting days as part of full- or part-time employment.

3. Review interpreter compensation regularly for all categories of interpreters to ensure salaries are competitive and begin to approach federal levels. When funding allows, and as permitted under AB 1032, use local stipends and signing/retention bonuses for the court interpreter workforce when negotiated with the union.

4. Support interpreter coverage across courts by utilizing remote technology to fill gaps. Continue working with the Judicial Council to identify VRI training needs.

5. Engage in recruitment and outreach activities by continuing or initiating participation in local career events, maintaining a social media presence, hosting quarterly "lunch and learn" sessions for bilingual staff on becoming interpreters, and participating in events such as Law Day and judicial internship presentations.

6. Partner with local high schools and colleges to promote the court interpreter profession, and highlight programs such as the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program.

7. Participate in or continue participation in the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program to expand the pool of qualified court interpreters.

8. Coordinate with attorneys and judicial staff to reduce last-minute cancellations of interpreter assignments, thereby avoiding situations where contract interpreters or court employees travel to an assignment only to learn it has been canceled.

9. Support aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters by designating mentors and informing them of training resources, such as the Workforce Pilot Program, to assist them in becoming qualified court interpreters.

[2] Some of the considerations for the courts may require extra resources to implement. These resource needs were not evaluated as part of these considerations. If additional funding or staffing is necessary for implementation, the council will prepare a funding request through the Budget Change Proposal process.

Study Framework

Legislative Background of AB 1032

Effective Jan. 1, 2025, AB 1032 (Pacheco; Stats. 2023, ch. 556), made extensive changes to the Trial Court Interpreter Employment and Labor Relations Act (Interpreter Act). Implemented in 2003, the Interpreter Act established procedures governing the employment and compensation of certified and registered trial court interpreters and court interpreters pro tempore employed by the courts. Major changes to improve the Interpreter Act under AB 1032 are summarized below.[3]

New Terms and Definitions

- "Intermittent, part-time interpreter" replaces "interpreter pro tempore," but there is no change to the definition.
- "Local compensation" means any amounts paid to employee interpreters by an individual trial court that are not paid pursuant to the regional memorandum of understanding (MOU) and are not calculated on an hourly basis.
- "Relay interpreting" is defined as the process by which two interpreters with different language pairs work in tandem to communicate between the target language and English.
    - Section 71802 authorizes courts to hire relay interpreters as employees, if the court also has "employed an interpreter of the same second language pair."
    - Section 71803 authorizes courts to hire as an employee a registered or nonregistered language interpreter to perform relay interpreting as an intermittent, part-time interpreter.

Privately Retained Interpreters

- Changes in Government Code section 71802(b)(3) clarify that an independent contractor interpreter may be appointed by the court when the interpreter is certified or registered and paid directly by the parties.

New Limits on Provisional Qualification and Appointment

- Under AB 1032, noncertified Spanish interpreters are limited to working 45 partial or full court days per calendar year, per court.
- For languages other than Spanish, including relay interpreters, noncertified and nonregistered interpreters are limited to 75 partial or full court days per calendar year, per court.
- The judge has discretion to extend new limits as necessary.

[3] Additional informational materials on AB 1032 have been created to assist courts with the implementation of the legislation and are available at *https://jrn.courts.ca.gov/programs/interpreters/cip-legislation.htm*.

Bonuses or Stipends

- Local courts can negotiate additional local compensation, which may include retention bonuses or other one-time stipends, for interpreter employees.
- Agreements for additional local compensation must be agreed upon by the court and the union and cannot modify any existing agreement or MOU between the union and the region.

Workforce Study

- Government Code section 71900 requires the Judicial Council to conduct a workforce study (this study) that provides recommendations to the Legislature on court interpreter availability and the future court interpreter workforce.

Changes to California Rules of Court, Rule 2.893, and Related Forms

- To conform with changes under AB 1032, the council approved changes to rule 2.893 and the following interpreter forms: INT-100-INFO, INT-110, INT-120, and INT-140, effective January 1, 2025.
- The revised rule and forms may be found on the Judicial Council website:
    - California Rules of Court
    - Judicial Council Forms

Court Interpreter Services

A fundamental goal of the California judicial branch is equal access to justice and to the courts, regardless of an individual's ability to communicate in English. With over 200 languages spoken in California, court interpreters play a critical role in achieving this goal by accurately interpreting for persons with limited English proficiency or deaf or hard of hearing. The provision of interpreter services is mandated for criminal, traffic, juvenile delinquency, juvenile dependency, mental competency hearings with appointed counsel, and mandated civil cases. For nonmandated civil actions and proceedings, Evidence Code section 756 provides that if appropriated funds are insufficient to provide an interpreter to every party who meets the standard of eligibility, interpreter services in civil cases should be prioritized by case type, as specified. Under federal law, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and who require sign language interpreters must receive court interpreter services at no cost in all court proceedings.

Description of the Judicial Council of California and Language Access Services

The Judicial Council of California (Judicial Council or council) is the policymaking body of the California court system, which includes 58 superior courts, the Courts of Appeal, and the Supreme Court. Under the authority of the state's Constitution and with the leadership of the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, the Judicial Council is responsible for ensuring the fair, impartial, and consistent administration of justice. The Judicial Council promulgates rules and procedures for court administration, develops and implements policies for the judicial branch, and makes recommendations annually to the Governor and the Legislature. Judicial Council staff assist the council with implementing policies and supporting court operations.

The Judicial Council's Language Access Services Program (LAS) is comprised of two units: Language Access Implementation (LAI) and Court Interpreters Program (CIP). LAI works to ensure language access for all court users in the California courts via the development of resources and trainings, grants, interpreter services funding, data analytics, and translations. CIP oversees the statewide court interpreter testing and credentialing process, along with other interpreter initiatives including recruitment and continuing education development.

Objectives of Study

This study provides available interpreter workforce data, projections of workforce need, challenges and opportunities, and recommendations to the Legislature regarding court interpreter availability and the future court interpreter workforce.

Methodology

The study was conducted by the Judicial Council's LAS. It references data from the *2025 Language Need and Interpreter Use Study* (*2025 Study*),[4] which was recently completed by LAS, and the annual language access survey, which is prepared by LAS for completion by the 58 trial courts. Because the *2025 Study* has extensive detail regarding court interpreter usage and language needs across the state, the goal for the workforce study is for it to be a companion study, including being more compact and useful for future workforce planning. Data collected was supplemented with focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders to develop findings, recommendations, and considerations.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to enhance the depth and reliability of the findings. In the initial phase, empirical data, such as statistical indicators and existing datasets, was collected and analyzed to establish a foundational understanding of the policy environment surrounding court interpreters.

To enrich and contextualize these findings, qualitative data was gathered through focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders and aspiring interpreters. These sessions followed a flexible format guided by a core set of questions, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistent coverage of key topics. In some instances, participants opted to provide written responses to the questions, which were also incorporated into the analysis. All responses were synthesized by question to identify common themes, differences of opinion, and insightful information.

The one group that had its own set of questions was a focus group conducted with individuals in the court interpreter testing pipeline. These individuals are on the difficult and lengthy journey to become a certified or registered court interpreter. They provided valuable information on the

[4] Available at *https://languageaccess.courts.ca.gov/system/files/2025-07/2025%20Language%20Need%20and%20Interpreter%20Use%20Study.pdf*.

challenges they have experienced with the certification process; as with all study participants, they provided valuable suggestions.

To strengthen the validity of the findings, the study applied triangulation across methods and data sources. This approach enabled cross-checking of information and helped ensure that conclusions were not based on a single perspective or dataset. The integration of diverse study inputs provided a more balanced understanding of the issues and informed the study's findings, recommendations, and considerations for improving the court interpreter workforce.

Data Sources

The study leverages recent data from the *2025 Study*, the Court Interpreter Data Collection System (CIDCS),[5] and other public Judicial Council documents (e.g., the *Trial Court Operational Metrics: 2025 Report*,[6] those issued by LAS[7] like the *Language Access Metrics Reports*, and the *Trial Court Interpreter Expenditure Reports*). Study references and resources are included at the end of this report.

Stakeholders for Focus Groups and Interviews

To expand on data collected and to help develop study recommendations, staff from LAS conducted focus groups or interviews with the following stakeholders:

1. Court interpreters and court staff (volunteers from the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel);
2. Court executive officers (volunteers from the Court Executives Advisory Committee);
3. Interpreter labor organizations (including the California Federation of Interpreters and trade associations representing contract interpreters or translators);
4. Language Access Representatives who work daily in the courts to ensure access for court users;
5. A Court of Appeal justice who has worked with interpreters and is familiar with language access issues;
6. Leaders of court interpreter education in the private sector; and
7. Aspiring interpreters (provisionally qualified and/or in the interpreter testing pipeline).

[5] The Court Interpreter Data Collection System is a program of the Judicial Council. CIDCS tracks actual court interpreter usage, including case type, number of interpreted events, languages, and costs, and also captures whether court interpreter events were handled in person, telephonically, or remotely.

[6] Available at *https://courts.ca.gov/system/files/file/lr-2025-tc-operational-metrics-ba2022-ch43.pdf*.

[7] Available at *https://languageaccess.courts.ca.gov/about/studies-and-reports*.

Current Interpreter Workforce and Program Efforts

Testing Requirements

To obtain **certified court interpreter** status in a major spoken language, individuals must successfully pass a Written Examination in English as well as the Bilingual Interpreting Examination (BIE) for their respective certified language and then enroll with the Judicial Council for inclusion on the Master List of certified and registered court interpreters.[8] The BIE is an oral exam with four parts[9] that is administered in the following certified spoken languages: Arabic, Armenian (Eastern), Cantonese; Farsi (Persian), Filipino (Tagalog), Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Punjabi (India), Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

To obtain **registered court interpreter** status in a spoken language of lesser diffusion, individuals must successfully pass the Written Examination in English as well as the Oral Proficiency Examination (OPE) in English and the target language (if available), and then enroll with the Judicial Council.

To obtain status as a **certified American Sign Language (ASL) court interpreter**, individuals must already possess a Specialist Certificate: Legal (SC:L), formerly offered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, or obtain an ASL court interpreter certification from the Texas Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) and then apply to the Judicial Council for reciprocity. Currently, the Texas BEI is the only available exam in the United States for ASL court interpreter certification.

Provisionally qualified interpreters are noncertified and nonregistered court interpreters who have not taken or passed the required examinations to become certified or registered court interpreters, but who demonstrate language proficiency and meet the requirements to be provisionally qualified by the court. They may be used when no certified or registered interpreter is available.[10]

The Judicial Council provides extensive testing resources on its public website. (See "Resources.")

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[8] Available at *https://languageaccess.courts.ca.gov/court-interpreters-resources/search-interpreter*.

[9] The four parts of the BIE are consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, sight translation from English to the target language, and sight translation from the target language to English. Candidates must pass all four sections of the BIE in one sitting with a score of 70 or higher in each section to qualify for certified court interpreter status.

[10] The court is required to appoint a *certified* interpreter to interpret in a language designated by the Judicial Council. (Gov. Code, § 68561.) The court is required to appoint a *registered* interpreter to interpret in a language not designated by the Judicial Council. The court *may* appoint a noncertified interpreter if the court (1) on the record finds good cause to appoint a noncertified interpreter *and* finds the interpreter to be qualified, and (2) follows the procedures adopted by the Judicial Council. (Gov. Code, §§ 68561(c), 68564(d) and (e); Cal. Rules of Court, rule 2.893.) The court may appoint nonregistered interpreters only if (1) a registered interpreter is unavailable, and (2) the good cause qualifications and procedures adopted by the Judicial Council under Government Code section 68561(c) have been followed. (See Gov. Code, § 71802(b)(1) and (d).)

Interpreter Workforce Data

With over 1,800 certified and registered court interpreters, California has the largest court interpreter workforce in the nation. However, the number of court-employed interpreters has been decreasing in recent years. There were 799 employed by the courts in fiscal year (FY) 2021–22, compared to 673 in FY 2024–25, a decrease of 15.8%. (See Figure 1.)

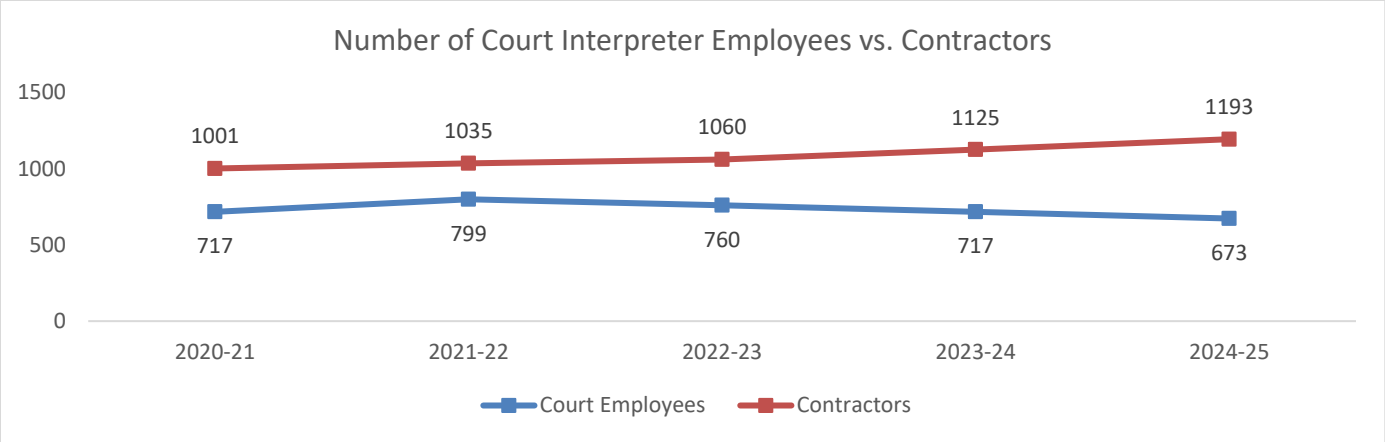

Figure 1. Number of court interpreter employees vs. contractors for FY 2020–21 through FY 2024–25

In FY 2023–24, Spanish was the most frequently interpreted language in the courts, followed by Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Punjabi. The number of interpreted events in Spanish that year was 635,060, but only 1,354 Spanish interpreters were available in 2024, highlighting the urgent need for more interpreters. The *2025 Study* shows numbers of court interpreters per language, including decreasing numbers of interpreters in some languages. Figure 2 (below) shows the composition of certified versus registered interpreters by year.

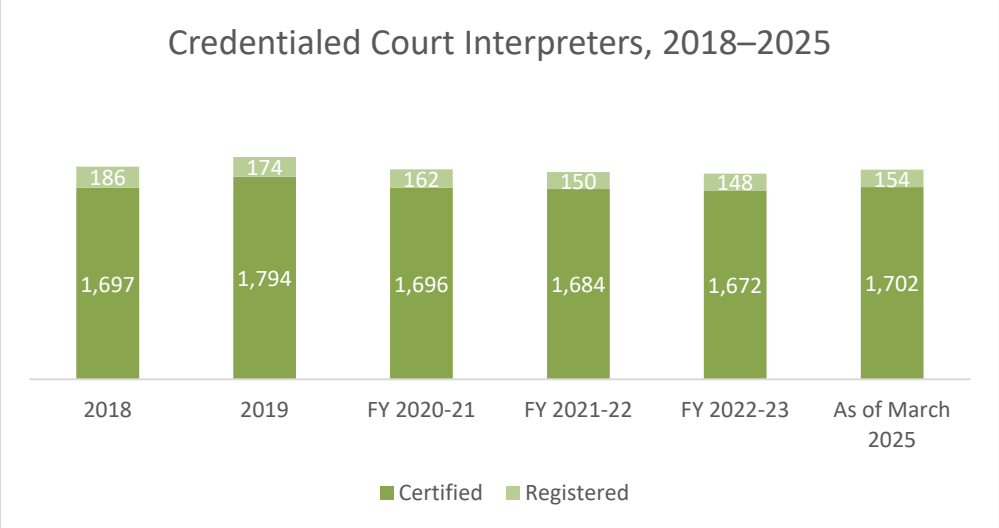

Figure 2. Credentialed court interpreters for 2018–2025

Civil Expansion
As resources allow, courts have expanded beyond criminal and other mandated cases to include interpreter services for all civil matters. This expansion began in the superior courts in FY 2014–15, following the enactment of AB 1657 (Gomez; Stats. 2014, ch. 721) and the creation of Evidence Code section 756. While parties may bring a privately retained interpreter to assist them in court, subject to the judge's approval, the court makes every effort to provide interpreters free of charge in all case types, as resources permit.

Funding for Court Interpreter Services
The Court Interpreters Program (CIP) is a restricted funding source that receives an annual appropriation of approximately $135 million—from the General Fund and transferred into the Trial Court Trust Fund (TCTF)—for trial court interpreter expenses that are allocated to trial courts. To address the continued anticipated growth in interpreter expenses and ensure that service levels are maintained, the Judicial Council is working with the administration to increase baseline funding for FY 2026–27 and out years.[11]

Employee Salary Data
California has four bargaining regions[12] that each contain multiple counties. Each region negotiates court interpreter salary on behalf of the courts in their region with the California Federation of Interpreters (CFI). Two courts, Solano and Ventura, are not part of the regional bargaining structure. The current salary data by region for court interpreter employees is below.

The data shown in Table 1 is from the current memoranda of understanding (MOU) between the regions and the CFI as of August 26, 2025. Pay range is for employee salary and does not include benefit costs.

[11] Judicial Council of Cal., Adv. Com. Rep., *Trial Court Budget: Court Interpreters Program Fiscal Year 2024–25 Midyear Reallocation and Augmentation* (Mar. 28, 2025), available at https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=14011686&GUID=1FE5BD1D-7EAB-4D89-83AC-08336557D1D1.

[12] Region 1 includes Los Angeles, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties. Region 2 includes Alameda, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Sonoma Counties. Region 3 includes Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Kern, Kings, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, Tuolumne, Yolo, and Yuba Counties. Region 4 includes Imperial, Inyo, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties.

Table 1. Current Salary Range for California Court Interpreter Employees

Region	Minimum	Midpoint of Range	Maximum (or High-Point)
Region 1	$88,389	$94,805	$101,221
Region 2	$85,946	$95,212	$104,478
Region 3[13]	$94,307	$97,178	$100,048
Region 4	$89,788	$95,460	$101,132

Salary ranges for California court interpreter employees are generally higher than in most states. Notable exceptions include New Jersey, where court interpreter 1/2 positions range from $74,455 to $105,726, and the District of Columbia, where staff interpreters earn $105,812 to $128,956. Court interpreters in the District of Columbia are paid more largely because of the city's high cost of living, the influence of federal funding and pay scales, strong competition for interpreters from federal agencies and international organizations, and high demand driven by a diverse multilingual population.

Federal salaries vary by court and region, but a recent California posting for a federal position offered $131,889 to $171,452, reflecting the higher federal pay scale and the requirement that candidates pass the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE) and hold federal certification in Spanish/English.[14]

The data shown in Table 2 is from a salary study from the Superior Court of Sacramento County, prior to the new MOU. Factored in are earnings, retirement, medical, and other benefits. The data does not list the amount for leave time accrued.

Table 2. Total Compensation for a Court Interpreter Employee in Sacramento County

Average Annual Salary	$94,753.44
Court Retirement	$35,864.18
Medical and Other Benefits	$23,092.16
Court Tax Contribution	$7,248.63
Total Compensation	$160,958.41

Comparison of Interpreter Pay in Other Fields

Generally, court interpreters in California have the potential to earn more than interpreters in the private sector, particularly when considering the average salaries reported (see Table 3).

[13] Effective February 1, 2025, Region 3 negotiated a 6 percent salary increase that will be effective for regular full-time, regular part-time, and intermittent part-time (IPT) employees. The high end of the range will grow to $106,163 in 2027 for employees eligible for a Step 5 increase.

[14] Salary range is from a September 28, 2023, job posting for an open federal court interpreter position in the United States District Court, Southern District of California, San Diego, California.

- **Court Interpreters in California:** As reported by ZipRecruiter, the average annual salary for a court interpreter in California is $77,242 as of August 9, 2025, which equates to approximately $37.14 per hour.[15] It is important to note that their data indicates that the largest share of these positions, 25 percent, pays $77,965 to $91,781. Their data shows $98,690 at the high end, which is below the potential range for court employees.
- **Freelance Interpreters:** The average annual pay for a freelance interpreter in California (noncourt work) is $47,147, or about $22.67 per hour, which is significantly lower than the average of $77,242 for court interpreting.
- **Legal Interpreters in Private sector:** Nimdzi Insights published a 2023 research paper that showed standard fees, as well as the minimum length of employment, for 35 California firms that provide legal interpreting services for certified Spanish court interpreters.[16] These individuals may perform court work or noncourtroom work for clients, such as depositions and out-of-court legal matters. Because the certification process in California does not require people who pass the required exams to work in the courts, some individuals who pass and enroll with the council may elect contract work. This also applies to court employees if desired during their career.
- The Nimdzi research found that the average billing rate charged by private firms for Spanish legal interpreting was $140/hour, with an average minimum of 3.23 hours, compared to $120/hour for medical interpreters, with an average minimum of 2.23 hours. However, it is important to note that the research did not provide information on other languages or how much the private interpreter earns on an hourly/yearly basis.

Analysis

- Data suggests that interpreters specializing in court settings are in high demand and command higher rates than general freelance interpreters. The same is true for medical interpreters, but they are generally paid less than legal interpreters.
- Data shows wide salary ranges by location. For example, San Francisco Bay Area court interpreters average $92,212/year.
- Private firms can charge high rates for certified Spanish legal interpreting.
- While aggregator sites provide average pay data that aligns with expectations, further research by stakeholders could be beneficial to assess the actual earnings of contract court interpreters in California across various languages and settings.
- Job security and benefits: Working as a staff court interpreter often offers significant financial benefits like medical, dental, and vision coverage; paid holidays; and retirement plans, all of which are less common for freelance interpreters in the private sector.

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[15] ZipRecruiter salary estimates, histograms, trends, and comparisons are derived from both employer job postings and third-party data sources. Note: data as of August 9, 2025. See *https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Court-Interpreter-Salary--in-California*, *https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Medical-Interpreter-Salary--in-California*, *and https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/What-Is-the-Average-Court-Interpreter-Salary-by-State*.

[16] See *Certified Medical and Legal Interpretation Services in California: The Cost of Provision* (2023), *https://www.nimdzi.com/certified-medical-and-legal-interpretation-services-in-california-the-cost-of-provision/*.

- The council competes with legal and medical interpreters who may take and pass the certification exam and then work in noncourt settings or medical interpreting.[17]

Table 3. Average Compensation for Interpreting in California

Job Title	Average Annual Pay	Average Monthly Pay	Average Weekly Pay	Average Hourly Pay
Court Interpreter Employee (FTE)[18]	$95,664	$7,972	$1,840	$46.00
Court Interpreter (All)	$77,242	$6,436	$1,485	$37.14
Medical Interpreters	$69,488	$5,790	$1,336	$33.41
Remote Court Interpreter	$65,461	$5,455	$1,258	$31.47
Simultaneous Interpretation	$56,451	$4,704	$1,085	$27.14
Remote Spanish Medical Interpreter	$49,962	$4,163	$960	$24.02
Freelance Interpreter	$47,147	$3,928	$906	$22.67

In conclusion, while there are specialized private sector exceptions, court interpreters in California generally earn more than other interpreters in the state. When looking at statewide pay averages, California is near the national average for court interpreters. However, the average yearly pay for full-time court employment in California ($95,664) is above the average pay for all states.[19] As noted, there are exceptions such as New Jersey and the District of Columbia where the pay scale for court employees is higher. The data highlights both the value of court employment and the court interpreting profession overall. It also shows the importance of California gradually increasing compensation to be commensurate with federal rates for contractors, which is discussed in the next section, and providing regular pay increases to court employees, as funding allows. These actions will ensure the state remains competitive to attract and retain qualified court interpreters.

[17] Government Code section 11435.35 designates court interpreters and administrative hearing interpreters as certified for medical examinations. Section (b) states, "Court interpreters certified pursuant to Section 68562 and administrative hearing interpreters certified pursuant to Section 11435.30 shall be deemed certified [for medical interpreting] for purposes of this section."

[18] Court Interpreter Employee is based on data from Table 1. All other data in Table 3 is from ZipRecruiter.

[19] Note: data as of August 9, 2025. See *https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/What-Is-the-Average-Court-Interpreter-Salary-by-State*.

Contractor Data and Comparison With Federal Rates

The Judicial Council first established statewide policies for contract court interpreter compensation in January 1999 at two defined levels, a full-day rate and a half-day rate.

Effective July 1, 2021, the council approved increasing and standardizing the daily compensation rate for contract court interpreters.[20] The current rates are shown below in Table 4. These rates are not mandated, and in practice, many contractors have been negotiating higher rates with the courts for their services, sometimes over the current federal rates.

Table 4. Current Rates for California Contract Court Interpreters

Session	Certified and registered contract court interpreters	Noncertified and nonregistered contract interpreters
Full day	$350	$220
Half day	$175	$110
Hourly	$44	$28

The above contractor rates comply with provision 18 of item 0250-101-0932 of the Budget Act of 2025, which states, "[T]he Judicial Council shall set statewide or regional rates and policies for payment of court interpreters, not to exceed the rate paid to certified interpreters in the federal court system." The current rates for federal interpreters are shown below in Table 5. The full-day rate for federally certified court interpreters ($566) is 61.7 percent higher than the full-day rate for state certified court interpreters ($350).

Table 5. Current Rates for Federal Court Interpreters[21]

Session	Federally certified interpreters	Professionally qualified interpreters	Language skilled interpreters (noncertified)
Full day	$566	$495	$350
Half day	$320	$280	$190
Overtime	$80 per hour or part thereof	$70 per hour or part thereof	$44 per hour or part thereof

[20] Judicial Council of Cal., Adv. Com. Rep., *Court Interpreters: Payment Policies for Contract Court Interpreters* (Feb. 17, 2021), *https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=9189125&GUID=CDB12CF5-C6C6-442D-8019-5FA16603B3E7*.

[21] Rates are available here. The three main categories of federal court interpreters are Certified Interpreters, Professionally Qualified Interpreters, and Language Skilled (or Ad Hoc) Interpreters. Federally certified interpreters have passed the specific Administrative Office (AO) certification exam. Spanish is currently the only language for which the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE) is currently offered, since that is the primary interpreting need in the federal judiciary. Professionally qualified interpreters have met alternative criteria, often for languages where a federal exam is not available, and this category includes California court-certified interpreters. Language skilled interpreters are those who do not meet the other two categories but can still demonstrate the necessary language skills to the court's satisfaction.

High rates charged by independent contractors are one of several factors that have led to the recent marked increase in court interpreter expenses. As noted earlier herein, the council is working with the administration to increase baseline funding for FY 2026–27 and out years to provide stable funding for courts to maintain interpreter services. The request will address rising expenditures for contractors and funding needs for court interpreter employee salaries.

Numbers of Certified Court Interpreters

Table 6 shows the certified court interpreter pool for spoken languages. Unfortunately, some languages have remained static or have lost numbers of interpreters due to the pandemic or retirements.

Table 6. Number of Certified Court Interpreters for California's Top 10 Most Frequently Interpreted Spoken Languages.

Language	FY 2020–21	FY 2021–22	FY 2022–23	2024*	Change from FY 2022–23 to 2024
Spanish	1,336	1,324	1,320	1,354	34
Mandarin	79	82	84	92	8
Vietnamese	58	55	55	55	0
Cantonese	28	28	27	25	-2
Punjabi	3	3	3	3	0
Arabic	7	6	8	10	2
Korean	55	56	56	54	-2
Russian	43	43	43	49	6
Eastern Armenian**	NA	NA	NA	16	NA
Farsi	10	10	12	11	-1
Other***	243	207	138	122	-16
Total	**1,862**	**1,814**	**1,746**	**1,791**	

* 2024 covered the calendar year.
** Eastern Armenian was not a top 10 language in previous years.
*** This includes all other spoken-language certified or registered interpreters.

American Sign Language

The discontinuation of certification programs by the California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf in 2006 and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf in 2016 left no pathway for new

ASL court interpreters to become legally certified, reducing the statewide pool to 39 by 2023. To address this shortage, the Judicial Council approved the Texas Board for Evaluation of Interpreters as a certifying entity in 2023 and revised the *Guidelines for Approval of Certification Programs for Interpreters for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Persons*[22] in 2025, providing greater flexibility to approve additional certifying organizations as they become available.

These changes have increased the number of certified ASL court interpreters to 50 as of September 2025. Language Access Services is also exploring pathways to encourage noncourt certified ASL interpreters to pursue certification, and the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel is identifying strategies to further expand access to ASL interpreters.

Table 7 shows the 30 most interpreted languages by region, with the percentage of interpretations for each region. This table is helpful to see how some languages are concentrated within a particular region.

[22] Available at *https://languageaccess.courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/partners/default/2025-02/ASL%20Guidelines%20Revised%202-21-25.pdf*.

Table 7. Thirty Most Interpreted Languages by Region (FY 2020–21 Through FY 2023–24)

Language	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4
Spanish	23.7%	23.6%	23.2%	26.8%
Mandarin	45.0%	19.0%	7.6%	27.7%
Vietnamese	4.0%	46.8%	7.0%	41.9%
American Sign Language	22.9%	14.3%	29.4%	30.5%
Punjabi	7.1%	17.9%	**70.4%**	3.8%
Cantonese	29.8%	42.7%	20.1%	7.3%
Arabic	13.3%	19.6%	21.7%	44.6%
Korean	**70.8%**	5.9%	3.5%	19.5%
Russian	19.4%	15.5%	51.8%	12.4%
Armenian (Eastern)	**89.6%**	0.2%	6.2%	2.9%
Farsi (Persian of Iran)	42.8%	9.9%	20.5%	25.4%
Tagalog	5.5%	53.5%	17.8%	21.7%
Armenian (Western)*	**99.0%**	0.0%**	0.3%	0.7%
Hindi	25.4%	25.8%	40.6%	7.3%
Mixteco Alto	**74.7%**	5.1%	16.5%	0.4%
Hmong	0.2%	0.9%	**97.6%**	1.3%
Mixteco	38.8%	15.4%	9.5%	0.7%
Romanian	4.1%	17.6%	31.7%	43.6%
Portuguese	9.4%	55.7%	15.9%	17.2%
Dari (Persian of Afghanistan)*	5.4%	22.1%	60.6%	11.4%
Lao	1.1%	8.1%	**72.1%**	18.7%
Mixteco Bajo	10.1%	**72.6%**	11.7%	0.5%
Khmer (Cambodian)	19.3%	7.1%	53.7%	19.6%
Triqui	0.0%**	**95.6%**	2.3%	0.0%**
Urdu	31.8%	14.6%	42.0%	11.4%
Mam*	2.8%	**71.3%**	17.3%	6.5%
Bengali	**91.7%**	2.2%	4.1%	2.0%
Mixteco de Guerrero*	**90.1%**	0.0%**	9.9%	0.0%**
Japanese	39.8%	20.0%	4.3%	34.4%
Kanjobal (Q'anjob'al)*	3.5%	0.7%	17.8%	**78.0%**

* New language in top 30.
** All numbers have been rounded to the nearest tenth. Instances of 0.0% are the result of rounding.

Usage of Provisionally Qualified Interpreters

When a certified or registered interpreter is unavailable, a court can provisionally qualify and utilize a noncertified or nonregistered interpreter by following the procedures outlined in California Rules of Court, rule 2.893.[23] As presented in Figure 3 and Table 8 below, the usage of provisionally qualified interpreters by the California trial courts has been rapidly increasing in

[23] Available at https://courts.ca.gov/cms/rules/index/two/rule2_893.

many of the top 30 most interpreted languages (see *2025 Study*). Figure 3 shows an increase of about 51 percent in the number of these interpreters used in court settings when comparing FY 2020–21 with FY 2023–24.

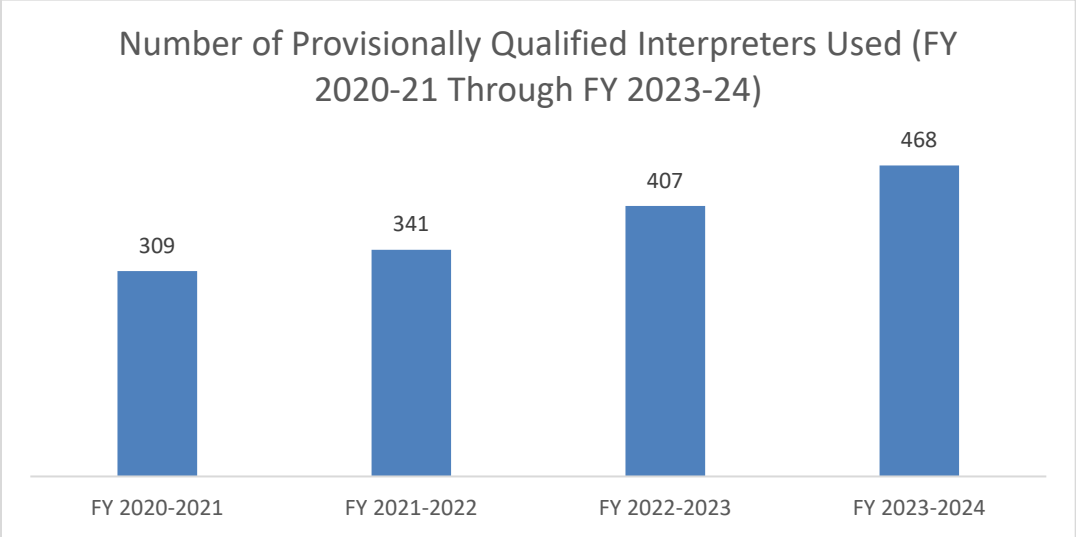

Figure 3. Number of provisionally qualified interpreters for FY 2020–21 through FY 2023–24

Table 8 details the number of interpretations and percentage changes for many top interpreted languages. When comparing FY 2020–21 with FY 2023–24, the following languages show significant percentage increases (greater than 100 percent) in the number of interpretations completed by provisionally qualified interpreters: Punjabi, Mixteco, Farsi, Portuguese, and Mixteco Alto, and the need for Mixteco de Guerrero has grown exponentially. The data further confirms the difficulties of securing credentialed interpreters for high-demand languages and meeting the rising demand of indigenous languages.

Table 8. Provisionally Qualified Interpreters: Number of Interpretations by Language (FY 2020–21 Through FY 2023–24)

	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	% Change (Comparing FY 20-21 to FY 23-24)
Spanish	3,766	3,545	3,168	4,984	32%
Punjabi	1,979	2,451	2,737	4,197	112%
Arabic	988	1,631	1,827	1,774	80%
Mixteco	550	725	556	1,331	142%
American Sign Language	610	878	757	866	42%
Mixteco de Guerrero	10	67	904	856	8,460%
Farsi (Persian of Iran)	276	322	617	790	186%
Tagalog	448	581	699	746	67%
Triqui	515	590	754	737	43%
Portuguese	240	295	421	543	126%
Mixteco Bajo	587	791	858	533	-9%
Mixteco Alto	175	872	235	386	121%

Age of Interpreter Workforce

A notable contingent (about 33 percent) of the credentialed court interpreter workforce is at retirement age, 65 years and older. See FY 2023–24 data in Figure 4 below. Losing this portion of interpreters would be an additional barrier to maintaining sufficient court interpreter services. To combat this issue, the Language Access Services Program is focused on a wide range of recruitment efforts. These initiatives include providing free exam preparation trainings to aspiring interpreters, examining the testing process (e.g., carryover scores), exploring alternative credentialing options (e.g., tiered credentialing), and conducting broad, multimedia outreach campaigns designed with stakeholder input.

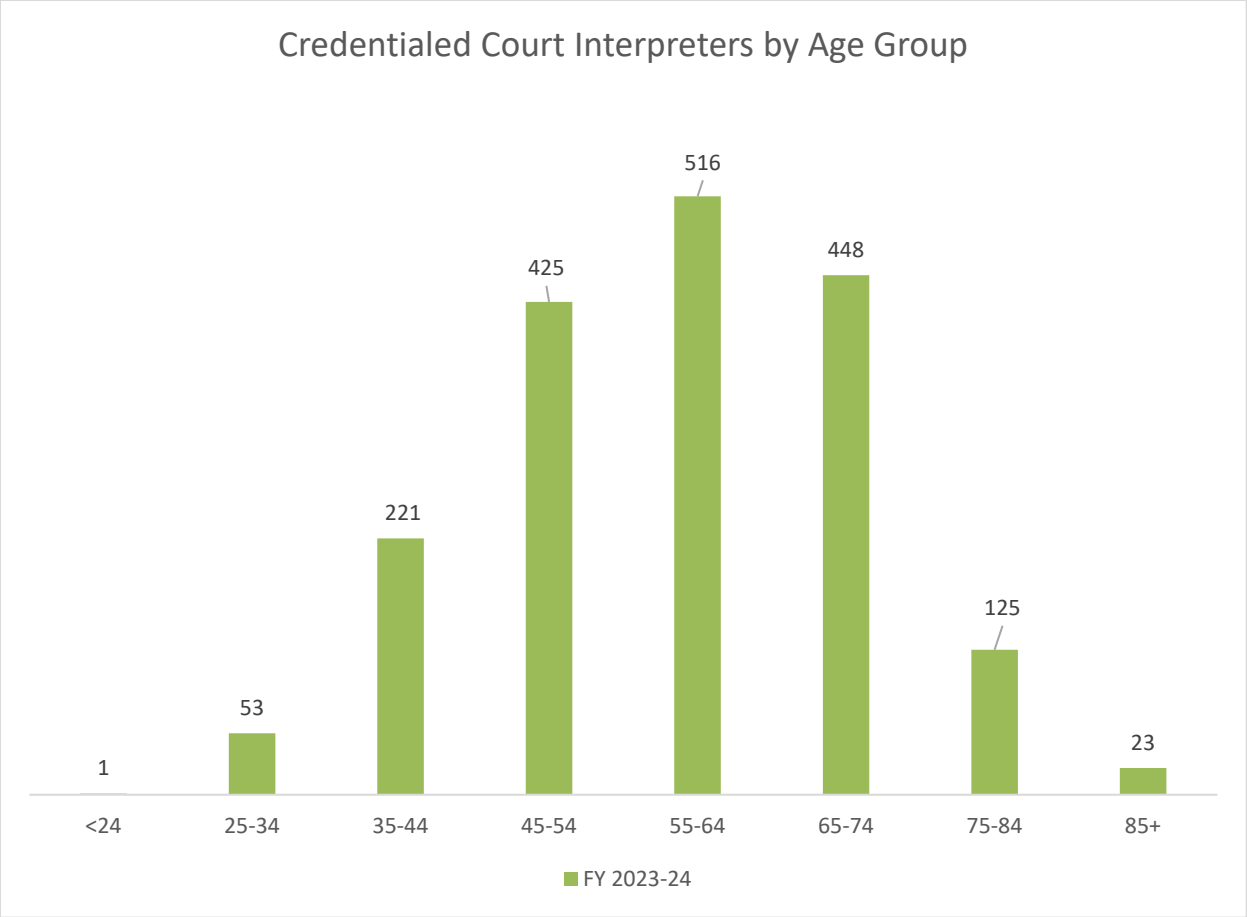

Figure 4. Credentialed court interpreters by age group

Program and Court Recruitment Efforts

California courts are challenged to recruit and retain qualified court interpreters to meet the needs of LEP, deaf, and hard of hearing court users and legal requirements. These challenges include a retiring workforce, insufficient numbers of interpreters in all needed languages, geographic constraints, independent contractor hesitancy to accept full-time or part-time court employee positions, difficulty in passing the required examinations, and difficulty competing with other industries (such as medical or private employers in the labor market).

The Judicial Council continues to promote the career and train all interested candidates about the steps to become court interpreters. This is accomplished through email marketing communications, website design, and free online courses. The council has also implemented a free and successful training program to (1) increase the exam passage rate for near passers, (2) implement a work force expansion program per the 2023 Budget Act, and (3) institute a recruitment program working directly with courts to communicate with them about the interpreter profession and help fill court interpreter vacancies. AB 1032, which went into effect January 1, 2025, allows local courts to negotiate additional local compensation, which may include retention bonuses or other one-time stipends for new or existing interpreter employees.

Projections for Future Workforce Needs

Vacancy information

Table 9 shows a growing vacancy rate for court interpreter employees.

Table 9. Statewide Interpreter Employee Vacancy Data, by Classification

Classification	2023–24 Schedule 7A (data as of July 1, 2023)			2024–25 Schedule 7A (data as of July 1, 2024)			Difference in Vacancy Rate (%)
	Total FTE	Filled FTE	Vacancy Rate (%)	Total FTE	Filled FTE	Vacancy Rate (%)	
Court Interpreter Pro-Tempore	29.6	8.4	71	26.2	6.7	75	3
Interpreter	204.7	149.2	27	207.8	148.1	29	2
SB 371 Interpreter	534.5	382.8	28	519.6	361.7	30	0

Method of interpretation

Data from fiscal years 2020–21 to 2023–24, which was collected from the *2025 Language Need and Interpreter Use Study*, shows that in-person interpreting overwhelmingly dominates the method of interpretation utilized by the courts, accounting for 96 percent of all interpretations in FY 2023–24. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote/video remote interpreting (VRI) peaked at 11 percent of interpretations but declined sharply as courts returned to in-person operations, falling to just 3 percent by FY 2023–24. Telephonic interpreting followed a similar trend, dropping from 4 percent to 1 percent over the same period. “Remote/VRI” includes any assignment where the interpreter is outside of the courtroom and is using an audiovisual platform, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, to provide interpreter services (see Table 10).

Table 10. Interpretations by Method, FY 2020–21 to FY 2023–24

Year	In-Person	Remote/VRI	Telephonic
2023–24	698,877	22,078	7,377
2022–23	639,583	25,401	8,325
2021–22	549,420	33,386	12,995
2020–21	384,560	48,892	16,765

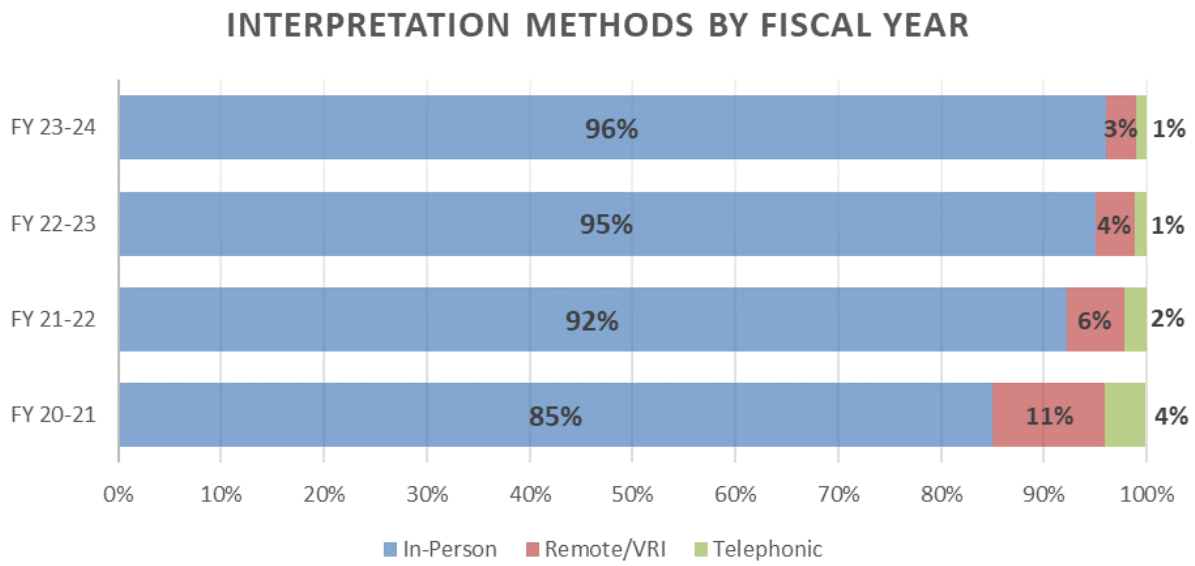

Figure 5. Percentage of Interpretations by Method, FY 2020–21 to FY 2023–24

A closer examination of interpretation methods across regions in fiscal year 2023–24 reveals notable differences in how courts deliver interpreter services throughout the state. Although in-person interpreting remains the predominant method in all regions, the use of remote/VRI and telephonic interpreting varies considerably (see Figure 5 and Table 11). Region 1 reported the highest use of remote/VRI at 6.5 percent of all interpretations, whereas Region 4 reported just 0.2 percent. Telephonic interpreting ranged from 0.3 percent in Region 2 to 2.4 percent in Region 1. These differences likely reflect a combination of factors, including interpreter staffing strategies, regional infrastructure, and local operational preferences.

Table 11. Regional Percentage of Interpretations by Method, FY 2020–21 to FY 2023–24

Region	% In-Person Usage	% Remote/VRI Usage	% Telephonic Usage
1	91.2%	6.5%	2.4%
2	97.1%	2.6%	0.3%
3	96.9%	2.5%	0.6%
4	98.9%	0.2%	0.9%

At the county level, disparities in method of interpretations are even more pronounced. In fiscal year 2023–24, 30 counties reported using remote/VRI for fewer than 3 percent of interpreted events.[24] This group includes a mix of smaller rural courts with limited interpretation needs as

[24] Counties with remote/VRI usage of 3 percent or more include Alameda, Amador, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Humbolt, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Los Angeles, Mariposa, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Siskiyou, Solano, Stanislaus, Trinity, Tuolumne, Ventura, and Yolo. Alpine data was not available.

well as large urban counties with high interpretation volumes. Several counties reported zero use of remote/VRI, indicating no remote interpreting activity despite active interpreter workloads. While telephonic interpreting remains in limited use in some areas, these patterns suggest that remote/VRI has not yet been widely adopted as part of local interpreter workforce strategies, even in jurisdictions facing persistent staffing challenges (see Table 12).

Table 12. Counties With Less Than 3 Percent Remote/VRI Usage, FY 2023–24

Counties	Total Interpretations	% Remote/VRI	% Telephonic	% In-Person
Calaveras	176	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Del Norte	60	0.0%	88.3%	11.7%
Glenn	23	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Imperial	4,480	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Orange	55,479	0.0%	0.8%	99.2%
San Benito	132	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sierra	10	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Tehama	911	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Tulare	22,936	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
San Joaquin	20,711	0.0%	0.2%	99.8%
Yuba	2172	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Kern	18,765	0.1%	0.4%	99.5%
San Diego	36,736	0.1%	0.0%	99.9%
Riverside	40,451	0.1%	1.3%	98.6%
San Mateo	27,841	0.4%	0.4%	99.2%
Colusa	1,830	0.5%	0.4%	99.0%
San Bernardino	61,758	0.6%	1.3%	98.1%
Kings	4,850	0.6%	0.0%	99.3%
Shasta	1,227	0.7%	1.9%	97.5%
Merced	10,498	0.7%	0.2%	99.2%
Sutter	1,990	1.2%	0.1%	98.7%
Mendocino	3,881	1.3%	1.2%	97.5%
Fresno	22,840	1.3%	0.1%	98.6%
Santa Clara	27,685	1.4%	0.3%	98.3%
Sonoma	21,783	1.4%	0.0%	98.6%
Madera	10,431	1.7%	0.3%	98.0%
Santa Cruz	4,807	2.1%	0.6%	97.3%
Butte	1,161	2.2%	0.1%	97.7%
Marin	5,267	2.3%	0.4%	97.3%
Napa	4,514	2.9%	0.0%	97.1%

These patterns highlight an important workforce consideration: remote/VRI remains significantly underutilized, even in courts with high interpretation demand. As interpreter staffing challenges continue, expanding the appropriate use of remote/VRI presents an opportunity to improve coverage and flexibility within the existing interpreter workforce, particularly in jurisdictions that experience ongoing recruitment or scheduling constraints. The Judicial Council's 2024 report on remote hearings in civil cases notably showed that around 90 percent of court users and 98 percent of court staff reported a positive experience, indicating that remote technologies, including VRI, have the potential to improve court user experience and increase trust and confidence in the California court system.[25]

Unmet need for certified/registered languages

Figure 6 shows the percentage breakdown of whether interpreted events were performed by a certified/registered or noncertified/nonregistered (provisionally qualified) interpreter.

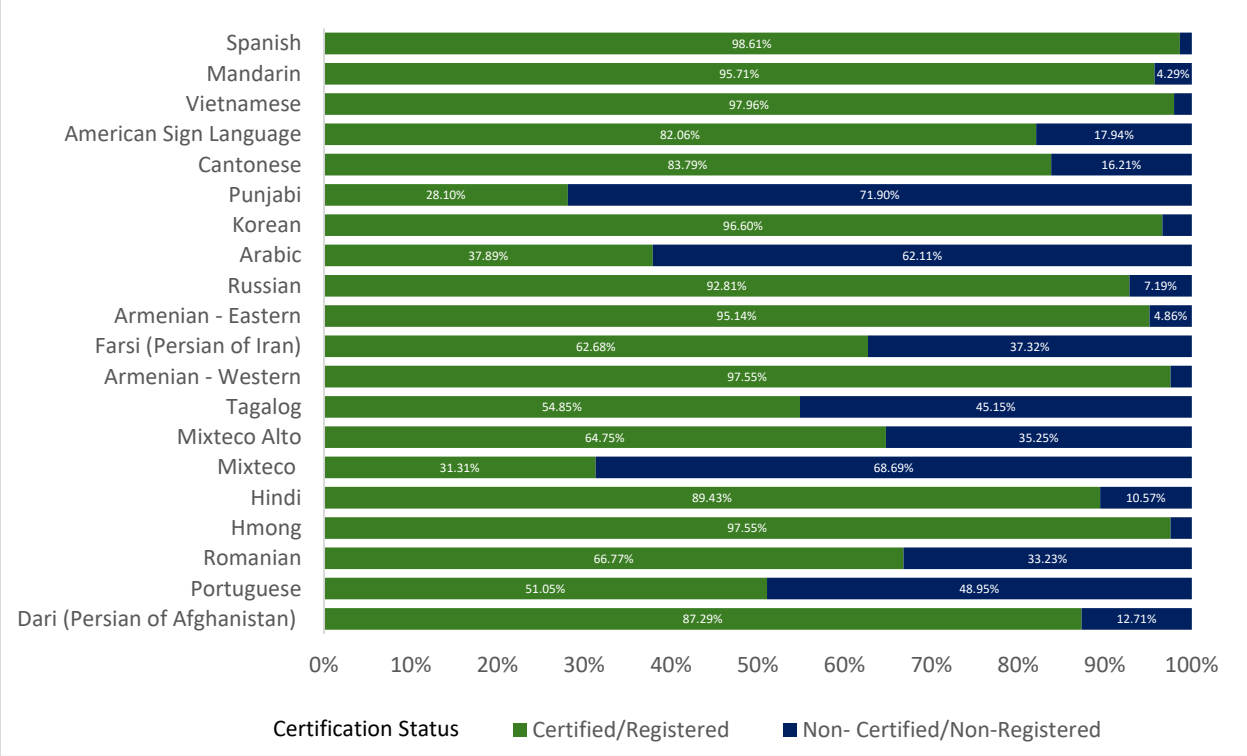

Figure 6. Usage of Certified/Registered Interpreters for Top 20 Interpreted Languages (FY 2023–24)

The figure above shows unmet need (the blue reflects percentage of events done by a noncertified or nonregistered interpreter). This data helps us to identify languages that are most in need of more credentialed interpreters and allows us to project the minimum need of additional interpreters in these languages to ensure full coverage by a credentialed interpreter

[25] Judicial Council of Cal., Adv. Com. Rep., *Report on the Use of Remote Technology in Civil Actions by the Trial Courts* (Jan. 29, 2025), https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=13703808&GUID=79B0A304-2A88-4019-9C6A-588FC9764F98.

(see Table 13 below). These estimates will also help the council and court staff to build networks of providers.

Table 13. Top 10 Languages Most in Need of Additional Interpreters

Language	Current Number of Interpreters	Percentage of Events Done by Certified or Registered	Additional Interpreters Needed (Rounded to Whole Number)
Punjabi	3	28.10%	8
Mixteco	3	31.31%	7
Arabic	10	37.89%	17
Portuguese	8	51.05%	8
Tagalog	6	54.85%	5
Farsi	11	62.68%	7
Mixteco Alto	2	64.75%	2
Romanian	9	66.77%	5
ASL	50	82.06%	11
Cantonese	25	83.79%	5

It is important to note that while Spanish and other languages may have higher coverage, it does not necessarily indicate a wide availability of interpreters in those languages due to geographic constraints and evolving demographics. The interpreter supply needs to be continually replenished with new interpreters to offset retirements and address local needs.

Testing and Pipeline Data

Table 14 shows the number of passers of the Bilingual Interpreting Examination (BIE), which is required for certification as a court interpreter. The Judicial Council's near-passer training, which launched in 2021, has proven effective in increasing the BIE pass rate, which previously averaged less than 10 percent. Participants in this training have achieved an average pass rate of 21 percent.

For illustrative purposes, when compared to the California General Bar Exam, another exam widely known for its rigor and difficulty, BIE passage rates remain low compared to the California State Bar pass rate for individuals seeking to become attorneys. The most recent overall pass rates for the California General Bar Exam were 53.8 percent in July 2024 and 55.9 percent in February 2025, with first-time takers performing significantly better than repeat takers.[26] While the bar exam tests knowledge and legal reasoning, the court interpreter exam

[26] See State Bar of California, General Bar Examination Pass Rate Summary, at *https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/admissions/Examinations/GBX-Passrate-Summary.pdf#:~:text=53.8*.

assesses bilingual candidates on their ability to accurately and impartially interpret spoken language in legal proceedings, with emphasis on fluency, memory, and interpretation skills rather than legal analysis. While recognizing these differences, passing rates indicate that the California court interpreter exam is more difficult to pass.

Table 14. Number of Passers of BIE (Required for Qualification as Certified Interpreter)

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total number of BIE takers	190	243	322	404
Pass rate	14% (27/190)	14% (34/243)	9% (30/322)	8% (33/404)
Total number of near-passer training participants who took the BIE	53	28	37	39
Pass rate	25% (13/53)	21% (6/28)	14% (5/37)	23% (9/39)

Testing Pipeline Data and Findings

Language Access Services staff identified 384 individuals in the BIE testing pipeline from 2022 through 2024 who are repeat test takers and noted the following patterns:

- Of the 384 test takers, 308 (80%) were Spanish-language candidates and 76 (20%) represented other certified languages.
- 107 candidates (28%) across all languages scored 65 percent or higher on at least three sections of the four-part examination.
- 152 candidates (40%) passed two or more sections with scores of 70 or higher.
- Within the Spanish-language group, 111 candidates (36%) passed two or more sections; of these, 55 (50%) passed three of the four sections, showing they are close to full certification.
- Across all languages, the simultaneous portion of the exam is the most difficult to pass.

At present, full certification as a spoken-language court interpreter requires passing all four sections of the BIE examination in a single sitting, with a minimum score of 70 in each section. Examination data indicates that a significant number of candidates are within close range of this standard and could benefit from targeted skill-building programs, such as the Judicial Council's near-passer training initiative.

A policy allowing passing scores on two or more sections to be carried over for up to two years across successive administrations would enable these candidates to concentrate on the sections not yet passed, rather than retaking those already successfully completed. The data further

suggest that several candidates may already be qualified for placement in journey-level positions under apprenticeships and tiered employment models, which would help address statewide staff shortages and anticipated retirements in the next several years.

Focus Groups and Interviews

There are several challenges and opportunities regarding the expansion of the court interpreter workforce, which were identified to be further explored through a defined set of questions with key stakeholders and aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters (see Appendixes A and B).

Key Stakeholders

Focus groups and interviews were held with key court interpreter stakeholders, including:

1. Court interpreters and court staff (volunteers from the Court Interpreters Advisory Panel);
2. Court executive officers (volunteers from the Court Executives Advisory Committee);
3. Interpreter labor organizations (including the California Federation of Interpreters and trade associations representing contract interpreters or translators);
4. Language access representatives who work daily in the courts to ensure access for court users;
5. A Court of Appeal justice who has worked with interpreters and is familiar with language access issues; and
6. Leaders of court interpreter education in the private sector.

Input from key stakeholders is shared first, followed by input from aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters.

Challenges in Securing Qualified Court Interpreters

Key stakeholders report significant difficulties in finding qualified interpreters for languages other than Spanish, and Spanish interpreter vacancies are increasingly going unfilled. Key stakeholders broadly agreed that recruiting court interpreters is difficult, though they emphasized different causes.

Court interpreters, court administrators, and the Court of Appeal justice pointed to the competitive labor market, noting that depending on their skillset and language, interpreters can often find more immediate or higher-paying opportunities in the private sector. Educational providers highlighted the lengthy court interpreter certification process, which discourages new graduates from pursuing court work. Many interpreters prefer contract roles, citing flexibility and reduced administrative burden compared to full-time employment.

Differences arose in how stakeholders interpreted the problem. Some argued that the court's employment structure is unattractive because it limits flexibility, while others emphasized pay disparities between public and private sectors as the central issue. Several also pointed to a misalignment between training programs and court needs, particularly for less common languages. Despite varying perspectives, there was broad agreement that the recruitment pipeline is struggling to meet demand.

Barriers to Entering and Remaining in the Profession

Retention challenges were consistently linked to pay, workload, and flexibility. Interpreters and labor representatives described employee positions as less appealing due to rigid schedules and expectations to remain onsite even when not actively interpreting. Contractors, by contrast, enjoy more autonomy and can leave once their cases are completed. Benefits such as retirement and health care were seen as strong incentives for long-term employees but were often insufficient to outweigh immediate disadvantages for younger interpreters.

Court leaders emphasized that courts already provide competitive compensation packages when benefits are included. However, they acknowledged that flexibility remains a sticking point. Educational providers added that new interpreters often view court work as unstable, especially with growing concerns about artificial intelligence (AI) and video remote interpreting (VRI) reducing demand. Overall, while stakeholders agreed on the key issues (pay, benefits, flexibility), they differed on whether the court's employment structure is an attractive long-term career path.

Language-Specific Availability Disparities

Stakeholders widely agreed that shortages are most acute in languages other than Spanish, though the specific languages noted varied. Indigenous languages were consistently described as the most difficult to cover, with courts often relying on universities or informal networks to locate interpreters. Armenian, Punjabi, Hindi, Tagalog, and certain dialects of Arabic or indigenous languages from Mexico or South America were also mentioned as high demand but hard to staff. Some court staff observed a decline in available Spanish interpreters for full-time roles, even as demand for Spanish continues to dominate statewide.

The reasons for these shortages were framed differently across groups. Court staff emphasized competition across courts and the logistical difficulty of lining up interpreters in rare languages, especially when demand is inconsistent or geographically dispersed. Labor representatives pointed to structural and financial barriers, such as the absence of certification pathways for some languages and pay disparities across the state. Educational providers noted that interpreters in high-demand indigenous languages often command extremely high private-sector rates, making courts unable to compete. Overall, there was consensus that while Spanish coverage is relatively strong, less common languages remain the most pressing gap.

Training and Certification Barriers

Stakeholders identified the training and certification process as a significant barrier to expanding the interpreter pool. The oral exam to become a court interpreter for certified languages was described as extremely difficult, expensive, and inflexible, with limited dates, long delays for results, and little feedback for candidates. Several groups also criticized the "100-day rule," which limits the number of calendar days that nonstaff certified or registered court interpreters can work annually in a court. For court interpreter testing improvements, both labor representatives and educational providers suggested reforms such as carryover scores from one

test administration to the next for candidates who pass two or more sections of the four-part oral certification exam, more frequent testing opportunities, and improved exam administration.

Perspectives diverged on how high standards should be balanced with accessibility. The Court of Appeal justice and educational providers defended rigorous testing as necessary to maintain professional quality, while acknowledging the difficulty of growing the workforce under current rules. Court leadership recommended tiered certification, allowing interpreters to handle simpler cases before advancing to more complex ones. Labor representatives and court staff emphasized financial barriers as particularly burdensome for candidates from underrepresented language backgrounds. Overall, there was consensus that while California's system maintains high quality, it also creates bottlenecks that reduce availability.

Pay, Scheduling, Remote Work, and Job Security

Across all groups, pay and flexibility emerged as decisive factors influencing interpreter recruitment and retention. Many noted that starting out as a contractor can be confusing and inconsistent due to varying court processes, making the profession less appealing. Benefits such as retirement and medical coverage were described as strong incentives for full-time positions, though younger interpreters often prioritize immediate income and schedule control over long-term security. Fear of AI replacing interpreters also added to a sense of instability in the profession.

Court leadership emphasized the trade-offs between employment and contracting, observing that full-time interpreters receive higher overall compensation when benefits are included, but many still choose contracting for its autonomy. A key tension lies in work-hour expectations: full-time employees are often required to stay until 5 p.m. even if their assignments end earlier, while contractors can leave once their cases conclude. Labor representatives further stressed the importance of remote work options, arguing that policies unfairly restrict employees compared to contractors. While all groups agreed that pay and flexibility are central issues, views diverged on whether job security and benefits offset the disadvantages of employee positions.

Structural Barriers in the Court System

Structural and organizational issues within the court system were widely recognized as barriers to interpreter recruitment and deployment. Smaller and rural counties struggle to attract interpreters due to small interpreter pools, location, lower pay, and limited demand, which makes full-time employment less viable. In larger urban courts, competition with other employers, high cost of living, and logistical challenges compound the difficulty of maintaining an adequate workforce. Both court staff and leadership described "bidding wars" between counties and inefficiencies caused by interpreters having to travel between courthouses.

The 100-day rule was repeatedly cited as a major obstacle. Court leadership, court staff, and labor representatives alike described it as administratively burdensome and counterproductive, especially in languages with small interpreter pools. Some proposed eliminating or loosening the cap, while others noted inconsistent enforcement across regions. Additional barriers included

outdated courthouses and facilities, lack of parking, and inadequate reimbursement for travel or expenses, all of which deter interpreters from taking assignments. The Court of Appeal justice emphasized that some of these issues reflect structural realities of the court system, but there was broad agreement that simplifying hiring, modernizing working conditions, and expanding remote options would help reduce barriers.

Recruitment and Outreach Strategies

Expanding the pool of court interpreters offers an opportunity to cultivate talent from diverse communities. Court interpreters and court staff highlight workforce pilot programs and mentorship initiatives as effective ways to introduce candidates to the profession and provide real-world exposure. Outreach through career days, Law Day events, adult education programs, and social media campaigns help communities understand the meaningful role interpreters play in public service.

Court leadership notes that educating younger generations about the profession's long-term benefits (like career stability, medical coverage, pensions, and opportunities to serve) can help overcome misconceptions about AI or job monotony. Educational providers emphasize early pipeline efforts, targeting high schools, community colleges, and universities to plant the seeds of interest for long-term recruitment. Partnerships with language institutes or academic programs can provide structured pathways into the profession.

Labor representatives see opportunities in structured career pathways, including apprenticeships; targeted outreach to students in language, law, or journalism programs; and incentives like competitive compensation. By combining mentorship, strategic recruitment, and clear career pathways, courts can build sustainable pipelines while reinforcing the value and professionalism of court interpreters.

Improving Training and Certification Access

There are multiple opportunities to make the training and certification process more accessible without lowering professional standards. Court interpreters and court staff suggest expanding exam availability, offering free preparatory workshops, and creating internships and hands-on experiences within the courts. These approaches allow candidates to gain the skills they need while maintaining rigorous standards. Santa Clara and San Mateo courts noted that mentorship programs and carryover scoring can accelerate readiness and reduce attrition, helping candidates stay engaged.

Court leadership emphasizes that tiered or apprenticeship systems can allow interpreters to gain practical experience progressively, particularly for high-demand languages. Labor representatives advocate for structured mentorship, practical preparatory courses, and flexible retesting options for specific exam components, which maintain quality while reducing unnecessary repetition. Incentives, such as competitive pay and career progression opportunities, also encourage commitment to the profession.

Educational providers highlight the importance of clear expectations, timely exam results, and visibility of training programs to support candidates. Partnering with schools and professional organizations can expand access to practical experiences and reinforce long-term pipelines. Together, mentorship, structured learning, and strategic recruitment provide a roadmap for increasing interpreter capacity without compromising the high standards required for the interpreting profession.

Recruiting From Other Professions

Expanding the interpreter workforce by recruiting bilingual professionals from other fields presents a significant opportunity to leverage existing skills. Court interpreters and court staff note that paralegals, young attorneys, teachers, engineers, and existing bilingual court employees often have the foundational skills and legal familiarity to transition successfully into court interpreting. Medical and immigration court interpreters are also considered strong candidates due to their experience with consecutive and simultaneous interpretation.

Court staff and leadership highlight the potential of internal recruitment within courts and local law firms, where employees are already accustomed to legal or structured interpreting environments. While the certification process can be intimidating, workforce pilot programs, mentoring, and clear pathways can help interested employees navigate the steps successfully. Educational providers recommend targeting language instructors and medical interpreters, who already possess strong language skills and communication abilities, making them ideal candidates for structured training programs.

Labor representatives emphasize the efficiency of focusing outreach and training funds on professionals with relevant experience. Partnerships with professional associations and targeted recruitment campaigns can create sustainable pipelines, while incentives such as compensation, guaranteed positions, or support for certification encourage participation. Overall, tapping into bilingual talent across professions strengthens both diversity and capacity within the interpreter workforce.

Role of Remote Interpreting and AI

Video remote interpreting (VRI) offers courts a cost-effective and flexible solution to address interpreter shortages, particularly in rural areas or for less common languages. Court interpreters and court staff report that remote interpreting improves timely access to justice and allows contractors to take assignments without travel constraints or wasted travel if a matter no longer needs an interpreter. The Santa Clara and San Mateo courts have successfully piloted VRI, demonstrating seamless service and potential for expansion. The Court of Appeal justice noted that remote interpreting is particularly valuable for retaining and attracting interpreters who prefer flexible work arrangements.

While AI is not yet ready to replace human interpreters in courtroom settings, it holds promise as a training and supplemental tool. Educational providers are developing AI-assisted programs that provide immediate feedback to students, helping them improve interpretation skills in low-stakes

learning environments. Court leadership and labor representatives emphasize that AI could support tasks such as translation of documents or advisement of rights, but human interpreters remain essential for ensuring cultural nuance, empathy, contextual accuracy, and procedural fairness for LEP, deaf, and hard of hearing court users.

Labor representatives and the Court of Appeal justice stressed the importance of proper infrastructure, training, and integration when implementing remote technologies. When used thoughtfully, VRI and AI can expand the talent pool, enhance scheduling flexibility, and support skill development, while maintaining the high standards and integrity of courtroom interpretation. The focus should be on using technology to complement and empower interpreters, not replace them.

Strengthening Partnerships with Education and Agencies

Collaboration between courts, educational institutions, and training programs presents a strong opportunity to expand and support the interpreter workforce. Court interpreters and court staff highlight the potential of partnerships with community colleges, high schools, and trade schools to offer structured training programs, internships, and job-shadowing opportunities. Remote training options and low- or no-cost programs for high-need languages can make the profession more accessible, while workforce pilot programs provide real-world exposure and help attract new candidates.

Court leadership emphasizes the importance of identifying skill gaps and helping candidates prepare for certification exams. Structured partnerships with schools, like those successfully used in court reporting programs or the council's successful near-passer training, can ensure candidates receive focused preparation while maintaining quality standards. Labor representatives and educational providers emphasize that apprenticeships, carefully structured tiered placement systems, and clear pretesting training standards are essential to helping interpreters gain experience gradually and confidently.

By creating a coordinated approach, such as convening working groups, offering teaching incentives, and providing mentorship opportunities, courts can align stakeholders around a shared goal of growing the interpreter pipeline. The Court of Appeal justice noted that including current interpreters in planning discussions ensures practical insights will guide program development, fostering long-term sustainability and strengthening the profession overall.

Policy and Funding Changes

Strategic policy and funding changes can significantly enhance recruitment, retention, and workforce development. Court interpreters and court staff suggest that increased pay, court interpreter involvement in decision-making, streamlined licensing, and modernized work practices would make the profession more appealing, particularly to younger candidates. Centralized pools for remote assignments and investment in workforce pilots, such as the current Workforce Pilot Program, targeting underrepresented languages can further expand access and address gaps.

Court staff and leadership emphasize targeted funding for hiring bonuses, internships, and reciprocity programs for interpreters certified in other states. Policy adjustments, such as statewide contractor rate caps and clear guidelines for flexible work assignments, help courts compete with private agencies while maintaining equitable pay and consistent staffing. Labor representatives advocate for transparent compensation, stable funding, and incentives that recognize experience and professional development. They also note that intentional outreach to underrepresented communities and languages is critical for long-term workforce diversity.

Educational providers and the Court of Appeal justice highlight opportunities for funding to support training, certification, and flexible work models, while also preparing interpreters for emerging technologies like AI and remote interpreting. The council's Language Access Signage and Technology Grants and other technology grants were cited as stable sources of funding for expanded access, including expanded VRI. Collaborative efforts, including conferences and knowledge-sharing forums, can help courts implement best practices efficiently across regions. By combining targeted policy changes, sustainable funding, and cross-stakeholder collaboration, the state can ensure a resilient, high-quality court interpreter workforce for the future.

Aspiring and Provisionally Qualified Interpreters

A focus group was held with aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters who are not yet credentialed but possess interpreting skills. The group represented candidates in the court interpreter pipeline and included:

1. **Provisionally Qualified Interpreters—**Appointed by judges when certified or registered interpreters are unavailable. They may serve in court under court rules and are expected to continue working toward certified or registered interpreter status.
2. **Near Passers—**Candidates who have taken but not yet passed the Bilingual Interpreting Examination. Many participate in Judicial Council training programs designed to help them achieve certification.
3. **Workforce Pilot Program Participants—**Members of a five-year, $6.8 million initiative (2024–2029) funded by the Legislature that reimburses training and exam costs. In return, participants commit to at least three years of court service after certification.[27]
4. **Aspiring Interpreters**—Candidates in the testing process who are not provisionally qualified, near passers, or pilot program participants. Selected from a broad pool to provide additional perspectives.

The focus group consisted of Millennials and Generation Z, including individuals who are at the beginning of their interpreting careers or have made prior attempts to pass the required exams.

[27] Since its launch on May 17, 2024, the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program has received over 2,000 applications from interested candidates. The pilot program is intended to increase the number of court interpreter employees in the courts. With many qualified applicants, the Language Access Services program is developing strategies and resources to keep nonpilot participants interested in the court interpreting career.

Challenges in Preparing for Certification Exams
Participants overwhelmingly identified the simultaneous interpretation section as the most challenging part of the spoken language certification exam, citing obscure and unrealistic terminology not used in real court settings. The lack of standardized, free study materials and unclear expectations from raters further hinder exam success. Many also described the testing process as opaque and inconsistent, with conflicting guidance from instructors. Additional barriers included test anxiety and rigid scheduling, especially the six-month wait to retake the BIE. Participants recommended more frequent test dates, the option to carry over passing scores on individual BIE exam sections, and Judicial Council–supported BIE-specific training.

Access to Practical Experience
Overall, practical exposure such as court shadowing and observation was reported as accessible across the state. However, participants stressed a significant gap in receiving actionable feedback or structured assessments of their interpreting work. Some participants were unaware of key opportunities like the council's Workforce Pilot Program, indicating a need for improved communication and outreach regarding available pathways to gain practical experience.

Difficulty with Nonlegal Terminology and Legal Procedures
Idioms and nonlegal terminology were cited as the most challenging elements of legal interpretation, particularly due to the subjectivity in how BIE exam raters score these segments. Participants felt confident in handling legal vocabulary but were confused by what exam raters deem "acceptable" interpretations, often feeling like they are guessing. Inconsistent terminology, especially in Arabic or other than Spanish languages, and the lack of standardized guidelines were also identified as barriers. Additionally, fast-moving courtroom procedures like motions, probate, and mental health matters proved difficult to interpret and observe effectively.

Feedback and Mentorship
Participants reported a serious lack of mentorship and constructive feedback, which undermines confidence and slows progress. Many expressed a strong desire for structured study groups, real-time feedback, and peer learning. The absence of mentors in other-than-Spanish languages and the lack of formal institutional support for study groups and review mechanisms were especially impactful. Some cited positive experiences from past programs like the one at San Francisco State University (SFSU) but noted those resources are no longer available.

Financial Barriers
Financial concerns were a significant obstacle, with participants describing the BIE as costly and inflexible. Many advocated for a sliding scale or fee reductions for low-income applicants, especially since passing the exam doesn't guarantee employment. The lack of sufficient notice for exam dates makes budgeting difficult, and travel expenses add to the burden. Additionally, limited exam seats and infrequent test cycles reduce opportunities to recoup costs through employment, extending financial insecurity.

Systemic or Institutional Barriers
The BIE process itself was described as a systemic barrier due to its biannual schedule, lack of score carryover for passing sections, and subjective grading standards. Within the court, participants felt a sense of gatekeeping, citing stories from veteran interpreters who discouraged change. The focus group members felt that some older interpreters believe that, because they struggled, everyone else should have to struggle too. Distrust toward the council's testing vendor and perceptions of profit-driven motives around exam retakes were also prevalent. The lack of standardization and transparency in exam content and rating criteria, especially across languages, contributes to frustration and a feeling of institutional resistance to reform.

Most Helpful Resources
Participants valued structured resources such as audio practice files, vocabulary lists, and feedback-driven study groups. Peer collaboration and access to accurate materials, especially if endorsed by the Judicial Council, were considered most helpful. Programs like the council's successful near-passer training received praise for being reliable and constructive. Many felt a centralized, free resource library created by the Judicial Council would be a highly impactful support mechanism.

Court Observation Experiences
Observation of certified interpreters was largely viewed as informative and motivational, though mixed in quality. While many professionals in a court setting were helpful and approachable, in their view, some interpreters were seen as being unprofessional or inaccurate. Overall, court observation was seen as critical but variable in its instructional value.

Preferred Training Formats
Participants preferred training formats that combine structure with interactivity, especially weekly courses with deadlines, simulations, and real-time feedback. Audio-based practice, both consecutive and simultaneous, was seen as particularly effective when coupled with immediate correction. Programs that mimic real courtroom pace and language, rather than the artificial pacing of the BIE, were seen as more useful. Court mentorships were also seen as essential in bridging the gap between training and real-world performance.

Mentorship and Networking Opportunities
Most participants were unaware of existing mentorship or networking opportunities, describing the landscape as fragmented and insufficient. There was a strong desire for networking among the Workforce Pilot Program participants and regional peers. Participants recommended more structured mentorship programs and clearer pathways for advancing within the field.

Motivation and Strengths
Participants expressed deep intrinsic motivation to serve their communities, ensure access to justice, and bridge language gaps. The desire to help others understand their rights and navigate the legal system was a common theme. Participants were further motivated in their pursuit by positive feedback from clients and the potential for stable government employment. Many cited

personal life experiences, language skills, and a passion for justice as key strengths they bring to the field.

Ideal Training and Support Program Features

An ideal training and support program would include a centralized repository of standardized training materials, audio libraries, and practice exams aligned with the BIE. Participants also called for consistent terminology guides, mock trials with feedback, and mentorship from certified interpreters. Fee reductions or financial aid for exams, carryover scores, and unbiased exam raters (ideally from outside California) were proposed. Participants emphasized that (1) the examination and certification process should reflect the realities of the court, and (2) the Judicial Council and educational providers should ensure that potential exam content aligns with instruction.

Conclusion

This study underscores the critical importance of ensuring language access for all court users in California, regardless of case type or income. The findings reveal both the progress made and the persistent challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining qualified court interpreters, particularly for languages other than Spanish and in rural or underserved regions.

The recommendations and considerations presented here call for a coordinated effort among the Legislature, the Judicial Council, and the trial courts to strengthen the interpreter workforce, modernize training and examination processes, and expand outreach to future interpreters.

Legislative action is needed to maintain funding, support workforce growth, and remove statutory barriers. At the same time, judicial branch initiatives can meet immediate needs and build long-term capacity by updating testing and certification requirements, expanding mentorships and workforce pilot programs, developing tiered systems and apprenticeship programs (especially in Spanish) to address anticipated retirements, and improving remote access. Together, these changes will give aspiring interpreters opportunities to learn and grow while strengthening services for the public.

Providing consistent, high-quality interpreting services is not only a matter of operational efficiency but also a fundamental component of access to justice. By acting on these recommendations and considerations, California can maintain its position as a leader in advancing language access and ensure that all court users, regardless of the language they speak, stand on equal footing before the law.

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Your perspectives and experiences were invaluable in shaping our understanding of the challenges and opportunities in providing equitable language access across California's courts. This work reflects the dedication of all who strive to ensure that every person, regardless of the language they speak, can fully understand and participate in court proceedings.

We deeply appreciate your commitment to advancing language access and your shared vision of a justice system that serves the needs of California's diverse communities.

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Appendix A

Questions for Key Stakeholders

The following questions were used with key stakeholders, except aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters which had their own set of questions (see Appendix B).

Barriers to Court Interpreter Availability

1. What are the biggest challenges the courts experience when trying to get a qualified court interpreter?
2. Why do you think more people don't choose to become court interpreters? *Follow-up:* Why do you think there currently are so many court interpreter employee vacancies?
3. Have you seen differences in how easy or hard it is to find interpreters for certain languages? If yes, which languages are most affected, and why do you think that is?
4. How do current training or certification rules affect how many interpreters are available?
5. How do things like pay, work hours, remote options, or job security affect how many interpreters stay in the field or want to join it?
6. Are there problems in how the court system is set up (like court size, location, or hiring practices) that make it harder to find enough interpreters? *Follow-up:* Any other barriers to having more court interpreters including employees that we have not identified?

Opportunities and Recommendations

7. What are some ways to encourage more people to become court interpreters? *Follow-up if appropriate for participants:* What outreach for interpreter recruitment does your court or organization conduct?
8. How could the training and certification process be made easier or faster, without lowering the quality?
9. Are there bilingual individuals in other professions who could be recruited and potentially trained to become court interpreters?
10. How could tools like remote interpreting or AI help solve the shortage of interpreters?
11. How can courts, interpreter agencies, and schools or training programs work together to grow and support the court interpreter workforce?
12. What changes in policies or funding would help the most in fixing interpreter shortages in your area or statewide? *Follow-up:* Any other recommendations or opportunities to expand the interpreter workforce that we have not identified?

Appendix B

Questions for Aspiring and Provisionally Qualified Interpreters

The following questions were used with aspiring and provisionally qualified interpreters who are in the interpreter testing pipeline.

Challenges

1. What are the biggest challenges you face while preparing for court interpreter certification exams? *(Examples: vocabulary, legal knowledge, test anxiety, access to resources.)*
2. How difficult is it to find practical opportunities to apply your interpreting skills before becoming certified? *(Examples: internships, court shadowing, mock trials.)*
3. What aspects of court procedures or legal language do you find most difficult to understand or interpret?
4. Do you feel you receive adequate feedback or mentorship in your current role or training? Why or why not?
5. How do financial pressures (e.g., unpaid internships, cost of exams, or training) impact your path toward certification?
6. What, if any, systemic or institutional barriers do you feel exist for people trying to enter the court interpreting profession?

Opportunities

7. What types of support or resources have been most helpful in your development as an interpreter so far? *(Examples: peer study groups, online platforms, bilingual dictionaries, instructor guidance.)*
8. Have you been able to observe certified interpreters in court settings? If so, what did you learn from those experiences?
9. What kinds of training formats (e.g., workshops, simulations, online courses) do you find most engaging and effective?
10. Are there mentorship or networking opportunities you're aware of or involved in? How do these help you?
11. What motivates you to pursue court interpreting, and what strengths do you believe you bring to the field?
12. If you could design an ideal support program for aspiring court interpreters, what would it include?

Resources

Data Sources

- *2025 Language Need and Interpreter Use Study*
- Court Interpreter Data Collection System (CIDCS)[28]
- *Trial Court Operational Metrics: 2025 Report*
- *Language Access Metrics Reports*
- *Trial Court Interpreters Program Expenditure Reports*

Labor Organizations that Participated in Study

- Association of Independent Judicial Interpreters of California (AIJIC)
- California Federation of Interpreters, Local 39000 (CFI)
- Northern California Translators Association (NCTA), a chapter of the American Translators Association

Judicial Council Webpages

- California Courts Website
- Language Access Services
    - Become a Court Interpreter
    - California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program
    - Current Court Interpreters
    - California Court Interpreter Jobs
    - Language Access Resources for Courts
    - Language Access Studies and Reports
- California Courts Self-Help Guide

Judicial Council Educational Resources for Aspiring Interpreters

Panel discussions and webinars

- Becoming a California Court Interpreter

[28] The Court Interpreter Data Collection System is a program of the Judicial Council. CIDCS tracks actual court interpreter usage, including case type, number of interpreted events, languages, and costs, and also captures whether court interpreter events were handled in person, telephonically, or remotely.

- Getting Started in Court Interpreting
- A Day in the Life of a California Court Interpreter

Getting Started in the Court Interpreter Profession Video Series

- What Is a Court Interpreter and What Do Court Interpreters Do?
- What Does It Take to Become a Court Interpreter?
- What Are the Steps for Becoming a California Court Interpreter?
- How Can I Prepare to Become a California Court Interpreter?

Test Preparation

- Self-Assessment , Practice Exercises, Suggested Reading, & Skill-Building Exercises, Additional Study Resources
- Bilingual Interpreting Examination (BIE) Video Training Series
- Written Exam Overview
- Oral Proficiency Overview

Education for Certified and Registered Interpreters

- How to Use CIDCS Webinar
- Ethics for Newly Enrolled Interpreters
- Interpreter Learning Portal

Resources for Provisionally Qualified Interpreters

- *Professional Standards and Ethics for California Court Interpreters (English)*, *(Español)*