# Introduction

California is currently experiencing a shortage of credentialed court interpreters in the state’s most frequently interpreted languages. To address this issue, the 2023 Budget Act created the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program and dedicated $6.8 million for the pilot. The pilot’s objective is to increase the number of applicants eligible for employment with the courts as credentialed court interpreters. The pilot will meet this objective by providing training recommendations and reimbursement of participants’ training costs and up to three examination fees so they can pass the required interpreter certification exams during the pilot. In return, pilot participants must agree up front to work in the California courts for at least three years after they successfully pass all required exams and enroll with the Judicial Council as a court interpreter.

# Program Description

The council approved the pilot program to begin no later than July 1, 2024, and run through June 30, 2029. Participants who successfully complete pilot program requirements, pass all required exams, and enroll with the Judicial Council will be eligible for employment with the court.

The pilot program will provide recommendations to participants for training and will reimburse participants for training expenses and up to three exam fees. The reimbursement maximum will allow an average of 100 pilot participants per year to be reimbursed an average of $8,000 per year in training and examination costs (actual amounts will depend on the number of pilot participants chosen each year). The program will reimburse expenses for costs of training and coursework and up to three interpreting exam fees per applicant during the pilot program.

The participating court will be responsible for providing an offer of employment to successful pilot candidates after they successfully pass all required exams and enroll with the Judicial Council, subject to available funding and open positions. The pilot program does not fund new positions. The court may determine whether successful candidates who complete the pilot should fill existing vacancies, or the court may create new positions, depending on its needs.

Initially, the program will include Los Angeles Superior Court and at least three other superior courts. All superior courts are invited to apply. Up to ten applicants will be selected per court, per year, during the pilot. The emphasis of the program will be on certified spoken languages or American Sign Language for which there is the greatest demand for interpreters. However, other languages will be considered based on demonstrated court need.

All applicants must pass a background check prior to participating in the pilot, and again upon completion of the program, prior to receiving an employment offer from a participating court. Continued participation in the program is contingent upon individuals demonstrating active and continuing progress toward obtaining certification. Pilot program participants must agree up front to commit to a study plan and work in the courts for at least three years after they successfully pass all required exams and enroll with the Judicial

Council. Participants must remain employed with the court for a minimum of three years to avoid having to pay back costs.

The court may waive, at its discretion, repayment of costs of training and exam fees if a participant leaves court employment prior to the end of three years due to a significant personal hardship or similar reason.

# Program Participants

The pilot courts must include Los Angeles Superior Court and at least three other superior courts. Applications from interested courts will be reviewed by council staff and prioritized as follows:

* Designated major languages (top four for the county) and number of interpreter vacancies/interpreters needed.
* Other certified languages not included in the four major designated languages for the

county and number of interpreter vacancies/interpreters needed.

* Registered languages based on demonstrated court need and number of interpreter vacancies/interpreters needed.
* Regional and court size considerations to ensure statewide participation.
* Court awareness of promising interpreter candidates that will be recommended by the court for participation in the pilot.

Once languages and courts are established, pilot participants may apply and be selected based on their likelihood of completing the program, passing all required exams, and the needs of the participating courts. Courts will be actively involved in the pilot participant selection process.

Pilot participants will be given priority if they fall into one of the following categories:

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| --- | --- |
| **Participant** | **Description** |
| Near Passer | Individuals who have previously taken the Bilingual Interpreting Examination (BIE) for certified languages and came close to passing but who need additional training support to pass the BIE. |
| Bilingual Court Staff or Equivalent | Bilingual court clerks or other bilingual staff, including provisionally qualified interpreters currently working in the courts, or other similarly skilled individuals, such as interpreters in other fields, aspiring to obtain a court interpreting credential |
| American Sign Language (ASL) | ASL interpreters with generalist ASL credentials who wish to study and pass the Texas Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) court interpreter certification, which is now accepted by the Judicial Council for work in the  California courts. |
| Registered  Language | Candidates seeking an interpreting credential for a registered spoken  language that is designated in the pilot. |

# Prerequisites

* Applicants must pass a background check as part of the application process.
* Applicants must also have a high level of fluency in English and their target interpreting language to be considered for the program.
* Applicants who have already taken and passed the Written Exam must have enough

remaining validity on their scores or they will have to retake the Written Exam as part of the pilot. Written Exam scores are valid for six years or four attempts at the BIE, whichever comes first.

# Proposed Timeline

Participants will be grouped into cohorts. Each cohort will have two years to complete the required training and pass all required exams, except for the final cohort which will have 18 months. Applications for the program will be processed and reviewed beginning in April; each new cohort will begin in January. Participants who do not complete the program in two years may reapply, except for the final cohort of the pilot. Sample timeline below:

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| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Timeframe (Sample)** |
| Court and language selection | February 2025 |
| Applications submitted and reviewed Applicants notified | March though July 2025 |
| Program begins – Year 1/Year 2 | January 2025 / January 2026 |
| First progress report due – Year 1/Year 2 | June 2025 / June 2026 |
| Second progress report due – Year 1/Year 2 | December 2025 / December 2026 |
| All training complete and all exams passed | No later than December 2026 (Cycle 1) |

***Participants will be grouped into cohorts as follows:***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Program Activities** | **Program Cycle - Timeline (Sample)** | | | |
| **Cycle 1** | **Cycle 2** | **Cycle 3** | **Cycle 4** |
| Court and language selection | April to June 2024 | February 3 to February 21, 2025 | February 2026 | February 2027 |
| Candidates apply and are  chosen | July to December  2024 | March 17  to July 31, 2025 | March to July 31, 2026 | March to July 31, 2027 |
| Candidate begins in pilot program | January 1, 2025 | January 1, 2026 | January 1, 2027 | January 1, 2028 |
| Progress  reports | Due every six  months | Due every six  months | Due every six  months | Due every six  months |
| Candidates must pass all required examinations | No later than December 2026 | No later than December 2027 | No later than December 2028 | No later than June 2029 (last  cohort has 18 months) |

# Expectations of Participating Courts

Participating courts will be expected to take an active role in supporting the program participants as they work toward becoming certified. This support may take different forms, to be determined by the court: mentoring, shadowing other interpreters, on-the-job training, providing training or reading materials or suggestions for self-directed study, and communicating to pilot program participants about training or volunteer opportunities. Specific responsibilities and expectations for court personnel during the pilot program will be shared, with their ongoing input and collaboration, as program processes and procedures are developed.

# Judicial Council Role in the Pilot

The pilot will be administered by the Judicial Council’s Language Access Services Program in the Center for Families, Children & the Courts. The Judicial Council will be responsible for overall administration of the program, management of budget, fee reimbursement, and collection of monies owed by participants who leave the program. The Judicial Council will also provide a recommended training plan and lists of resources, process applications, assist courts as needed with selecting applicants, and monitor participant progress.

# Recommended Training and Exam Preparation

***Required courses and topics will include:***

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| --- | --- |
|  | Introduction to Court Interpreting & Fundamentals of Legal Interpreting |
|  | California/U.S. Law for Court Interpreters (vocabulary building & court procedures)   * Criminal & Civil Procedure * Family Law * Small Claims & Working with Self-Represented Litigants |
|  | Medical Terminology for Court Interpreters |
|  | Public Speaking, Presentation Skills & Diction for Interpreters |
|  | Introduction to Simultaneous Interpreting for Legal Proceedings   * Arraignment Calendar * Interpreting at the Defense table |
|  | Sight Translation: Foreign Language to English & English to Foreign Language   * Legal Documents – birth certificate, coroner’s report, police report, deposition transcript * General Documents – sentencing letter, other documentary evidence (receipts, bills, bank statements, text messages, emails) |
|  | Introduction to Consecutive Interpreting   * Witness Stand – Lay Witness * Administrative Hearings & Depositions |
|  | Consecutive Note Taking & Memory Building/Improvement |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Advanced Simultaneous Interpreting for Legal Proceedings   * Jury Instructions * Expert Witness Testimony – police, ballistics, forensics, pathologist |
|  | Remote Interpreting: VRI, Technologies, Ethical Challenges |
|  | Interpreting Skills Building Training (aka “Near-Passer” Training) offered by Judicial Council |

***Recommended course topics will include:***

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| --- | --- |
|  | Court Interpreting Profession |
|  | Interpreting and Translating Organization |
|  | Law and Court Procedures |
|  | Medical Terminology for Interpreters |

***Recommended self-directed exam preparation activities will include:***

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| --- | --- |
|  | Courtroom observation |
|  | Volunteer interpreting |
|  | Reading in all working languages to build vocabulary – specialized and general |
|  | Language immersion in target language (for non-native speakers) |

# Required Certification Exams for Spoken Language

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Credential** | **Exams** | **Passing Score** |
| Certified Language Interpreter | Written Exam  Bilingual Interpreting Exam in target language | 80%  70% in all four sections in one sitting |
| Registered Language Interpreter | Written Exam OPE English  OPE in target language | 80%  Advanced or higher Advanced or higher |

# ASL Court Interpreters

Currently, California does not offer a certification exam for ASL court interpreters. However, effective January 1, 2024, the Judicial Council approved the Texas Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) as an approved testing entity for American Sign Language (ASL) court interpreter certification. More information is provided in the [*Bulletin for Interpreters on the Texas ASL Court Interpreter Certification*](https://languageaccess.courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/partners/default/2024-01/Bulletin_for_Interpreters_TX_ASL_Jan_2024.pdf). While the pilot can support up to three exam fees, including Texas exam fees, ASL pilot candidates must already possess an ASL Generalist Credential (e.g., RID Generalist Certification) to be accepted into the pilot program.