



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS

Language Access Program 2023 Annual Report

Superior Court of the District of Columbia
Special Operations Division -
Office of Court Interpreting Services

April 25, 2024

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
A. Interpretation Services	3
B. Translation Services	3
C. Testing and Training Services.....	3
D. Language Access Resources	3
E. National Ranking.....	4
I. INTRODUCTION	5
A. Mission	5
B. Evolution	5
C. Services	6
D. OCIS Organizational Structure	6
II. INTERPRETATION SERVICES	7
A. 2023 Interpretation Data	7
B. Delivery of Interpretation Services	9
III. TRANSLATION SERVICES	11
A. 2023 Translation Data.....	11
IV. INTERPRETER REGISTRY	13
V. TESTING AND TRAINING SERVICES	14
A. DC Courts’ Interpreter Registry.....	14
B. American Sign Language Interpreters.....	14
C. Judicial Officers	15
D. Court Staff, CJA, and CCAN Attorneys.....	16
VI. LANGUAGE ACCESS RESOURCES	16
VII. CONCLUSION	17

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Interpretation Services

In 2023, the Office of Court Interpreting Services (OCIS) assigned interpreters on 8,793 occasions to fulfill 7,291 interpretation events in 58 distinct languages. This represents a 27% increase in the number of interpreter assignments and a 27% increase in the number of events compared to 2022. Of all interpretation requests, 66% were for Spanish speakers. Other frequently requested languages included American Sign Language (9.5%), Amharic (7.2%), French (3.3%), Arabic (2.4%), Mandarin (2.0%), and Tigrinya (1.2%). Interpreting services were provided for both in-person and remote hearings.

B. Translation Services

In 2023, OCIS processed 536 document translations compared to 621 in 2022, a decrease of 16%. These translations included court orders, notices, summons, handbooks, forms, and tip sheets for court users. Spanish translations accounted for 68% of all translation requests and Amharic accounted for 18%.

C. Testing and Training Services

OCIS facilitated the administration of 16 exams and assessments for contract interpreters, court personnel, and CJA (Criminal Justice Act) and CCAN (Counsel for Child Abuse and Neglect) attorneys in 2023, and 46 training events for contract interpreters, judicial officers, and court personnel. In 2023, OCIS held a series of specialized workshops for ASL interpreters to prepare them for work at the DC Courts.

D. Language Access Resources

In 2023, OCIS continued to refine its data management system (the Web Interpreter and Translator System or “WITS”) to improve and enhance data accuracy, transparency, and reporting capabilities. In addition, key language access resources for external and internal stakeholders were published on digital platforms, printed material, and multimedia content, including but not limited to a dedicated Language Access page on the DC Courts’ website to

inform external stakeholders of the language access services available at the Courts, and a Language Access Toolkit published on the Courts' intranet to support court staff and internal stakeholders when engaging with a member of the public requiring language assistance.

E. National Ranking

The Courts' language access program ranked 12th nationwide in the National Center for Access to Justice's 2021 Justice Index ranking for language access.¹ (The Courts previously ranked 16th in this category in the 2016 Justice Index.)

¹ <https://ncj.org/state-rankings/justice-index/language-access>

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Mission

The language access program of the District of Columbia Courts (the Courts) is an overarching, comprehensive program for language access services that is designed and implemented to serve the language access needs of the Courts' internal and external stakeholders.

Consistent with the Courts' vision statement, "Open to All, Trusted by All, Justice for All," and its strategic goals,² the mission of the language access program is to provide effective and timely language access services at no cost for Limited English Proficient (LEP) and deaf and hard-of-hearing persons doing business with the Courts in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990,³ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794),⁴ Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. § 2000d *et seq.*),⁵ and the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. § 3789d(c)).⁶

B. Evolution

The language access program has evolved since its inception as the Courts' interpreting services program with a limited mandate of providing interpretation services under certain circumstances. The Office of Court Interpreting Services was established in 1987 as an office in the Special Operations Division of the Superior Court. Over the years, the breadth of OCIS' services expanded, and its mandate was formally established by Administrative Orders 98-12,

² The six main goals outlined in the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan are: Access to Justice for All; Public Trust and Confidence; A Great Place to Work; Effective Court Administration; Fair and Timely Case Resolution; and Racial Equity and Cultural Competence.

³ <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/ada/>

⁴ <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/disability/laws-guidance/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/needful-families/civil-rights-requirements/index.html>

⁶ <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/omnibus-crime-control-and-safe-streets-act-1968>

09-04,⁷ and 09-09,⁸ culminating in Administrative Order 14-15,⁹ which was issued by Chief Judge Lee F. Satterfield in 2014.

In 2012, the position of the OCIS Supervisor was reclassified to Language Access Coordinator. The Language Access Coordinator was tasked with the responsibility for implementing and updating the DC Courts' Language Access Plan,¹⁰ which provides the framework for the language access program. In 2015, Joint Administrative Order 15-1¹¹ was issued to establish a Language Access Advisory Committee for the purpose of advising the Language Access Coordinator on ways to implement and improve the Language Access Plan.

C. Services

The language access program is administered by OCIS¹² except for the testing and hiring of Spanish and English bilingual employees,¹³ which falls under the purview of the Human Resources Division. The following components of the language access program are covered in this annual report:

- Interpretation services
- Translation services
- Testing and training services
- Language access resources

D. OCIS Organizational Structure

OCIS is a high-volume, fast-paced office that manages an Interpreter Registry of over 185 contractors and engages multiple independent agencies to provide interpretation and translation services to meet the Courts' daily language access needs.

⁷ https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/09-04_Court_Interpreting_Services_Supersedes%2098-12.pdf

⁸ <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/2017-03/09-09.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/2017-03/14-15-Court-Interpreting-Services-Vacates-Administrative-Orders-09-09-09-04-and-98-12.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/divisionspdfs/Language_Access_Plan_DC_Courts.pdf

¹¹ https://www.dccourts.gov/sites/default/files/2017-03/Joint-Administrative-Order-creating-Language-Access-Advisory-Committee_15-1.pdf

¹² <https://www.dccourts.gov/index.php/services/language-access-services>

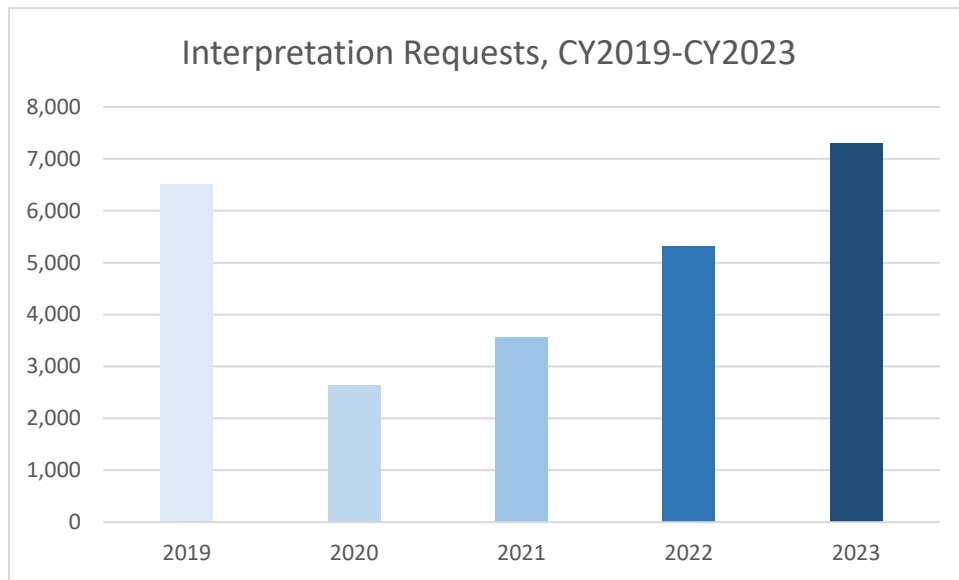
¹³ There are 31 positions designated as bilingual (Spanish) within the Courts.

OCIS is staffed by five employees: a Language Access Coordinator who manages OCIS and the language access program; a Program Officer who administers the DC Courts' Interpreter Registry; a Program Specialist who processes interpreter requests; and a staff Spanish interpreter and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter who provide interpretation services and administrative support.

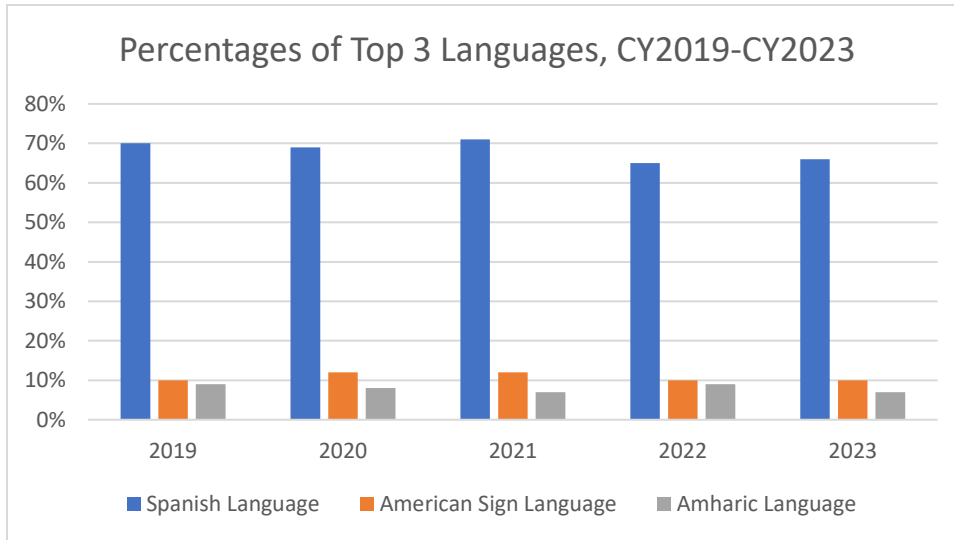
II. INTERPRETATION SERVICES

A. 2023 Interpretation Data

Interpretation services are provided by OCIS staff, DC Courts' Interpreter Registry contract interpreters, and independent interpretation agencies. In 2023, OCIS fulfilled 7,291 requests for interpretation services in 58 distinct languages (see Appendix A). This is a sharp increase from the number of interpretation requests received in each of the previous three years, and represents a 12% increase in interpretation requests compared to the pre-pandemic data of 2019.

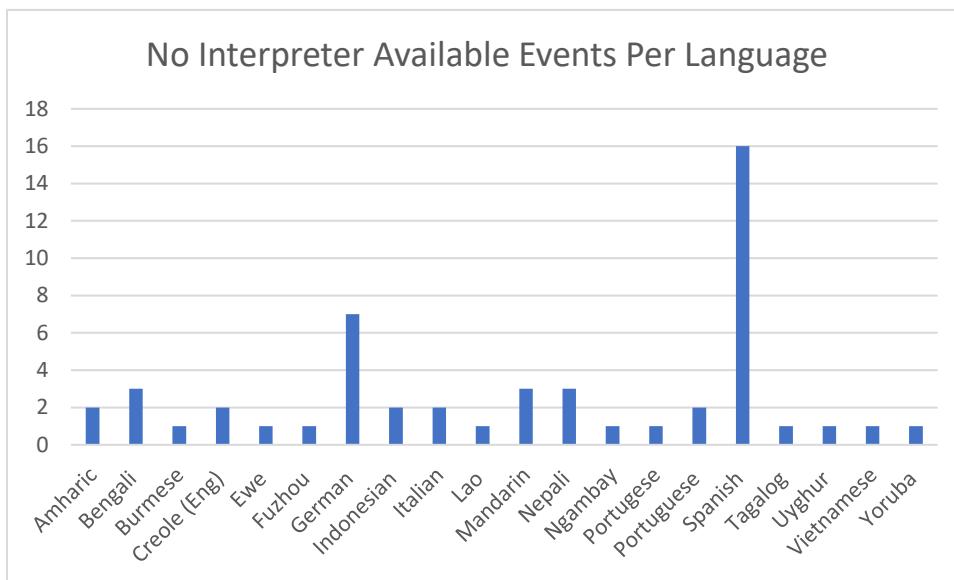


As in previous years, the three most requested languages in 2023 were Spanish, ASL, and Amharic. Spanish consistently represents the majority of requests at approximately 66%.



Included in the data for ASL requests are the interpretation services provided to deaf prospective jurors summoned to perform their civic duty. In 2023, 62 deaf jurors were issued summonses to report for jury duty. Of those, eight petit jurors were empaneled and served for a combined total of 30 days. One deaf grand juror was empaneled and served for 22 days.

In 2023, OCIS was unable to provide interpreters for 52 events (0.7% of all requests) on the scheduled dates. OCIS provided interpreter services for the majority of the events at their continued dates and a telephonic interpretation service, Language Line Solutions (LLS), was used on the initial scheduled date.¹⁴



¹⁴ LLS usage is not included in OCIS' interpretation data.

B. Delivery of Interpretation Services

During 2023, OCIS continued to innovate, leverage technology, and implement best practices to ensure effective and timely interpretation services for virtual,¹⁵ remote,¹⁶ hybrid,¹⁷ and in-person¹⁸ proceedings. OCIS engaged more interpreters to appear onsite to better accommodate both in-person and remote proceedings. OCIS secured an additional room for video remote interpretation (VRI) for onsite¹⁹ interpreters, for a total of three VRI rooms in the courthouse. The VRI rooms are equipped with necessary technology and equipment for optimum delivery of services, including additional support items like ring lights and backdrops to enhance ASL interpretation and ensure clear visual communication of linguistic markers. The VRI rooms also provide privacy to safeguard the confidential nature of certain proceedings and minimize distractions both to interpreters and to LEP persons.

Webex is the video conferencing platform for operating divisions and over which OCIS staff and contract interpreters deliver their remote interpretation services. During 2023, simultaneous interpretation²⁰ was not available for virtual hearings over Webex, therefore interpretation services were delivered in consecutive mode,²¹ which is a talk and pause method. To maintain a level of efficiency, interpreters use cell phones to interpret over Webex for LEP persons who use their cell phones to receive the interpretation. The LEP person must have access to two devices, one to listen to the interpretation and a second to access the Webex session. A more efficient, user friendly mechanism for simultaneous interpretation over Webex may be further explored in 2024 in collaboration with the Information and Technology Division.

Onsite interpretation requests steadily increased during the course of 2023 in direct correlation with the increase in overall requests. OCIS fulfilled 4,298 onsite requests and 2,993

¹⁵ <https://www.dccourts.gov/reimaginingdcsc>

¹⁶ <https://www.dccourts.gov/reimaginingdcsc>

¹⁷ <https://www.dccourts.gov/reimaginingdcsc>

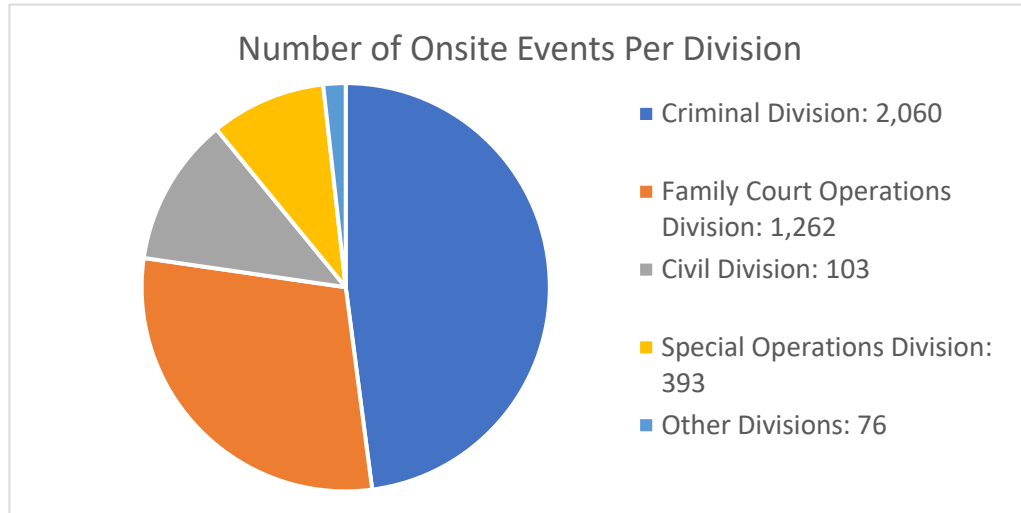
¹⁸ <https://www.dccourts.gov/reimaginingdcsc>

¹⁹ For OCIS purposes, “onsite” assignments are those performed at the courthouse, in person in the courtroom.

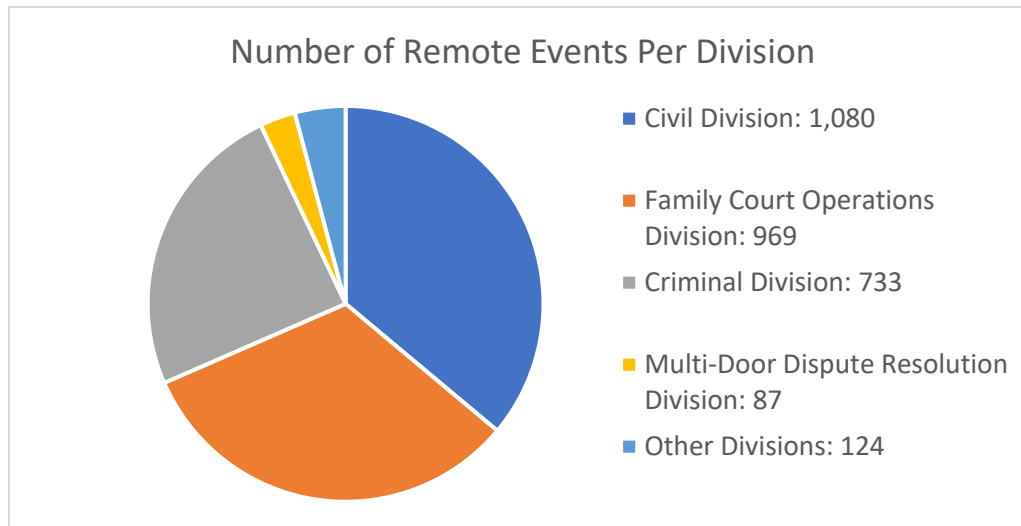
²⁰ Simultaneous interpretation is when an interpreter interprets the message from the source language to the target language in real-time.

²¹ Consecutive interpretation is when an interpreter takes notes while the speaker is talking and waits for the speaker to pause before rendering the message into the target language.

remote requests. The majority of onsite interpretation events took place in the Criminal Division, followed by the Family Court Operations Division, the Special Operations Division, the Civil Division, and other divisions:²²



The majority of remote interpretation events took place in the Civil Division, followed by the Family Court Operations Division, the Criminal Division, the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, and other divisions:²³



²² Other divisions where onsite interpretation events took place were the Probate Division, Domestic Violence Division, Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, Executive Office, DC Court of Appeals, Court Social Services Division, Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court, Crime Victims' Compensation Program, Court Reporting Division, and Office of the Auditor Master, each at less than 1% of all onsite interpretation events.

²³ Other divisions where remote interpretation events took place were the Probate Division, at less than 3% of all remote interpretation events, and the Special Operations Division, Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court, Domestic Violence Division, Center for Education and Training, and DC Court of Appeals, each at less than 1% of all remote interpretation events.

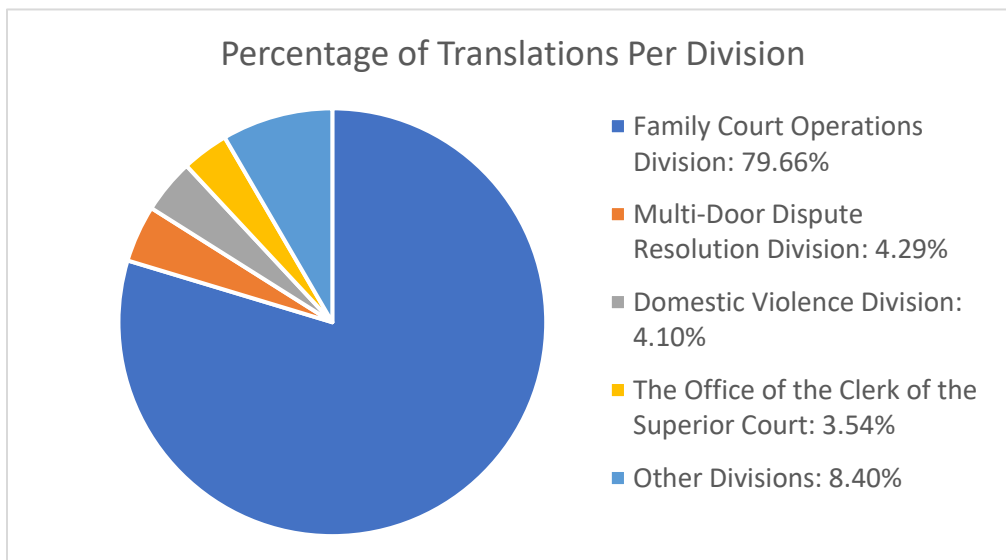
III. TRANSLATION SERVICES

A. 2023 Translation Data

It is the Courts' policy to provide translation²⁴ services free of charge to assist LEP persons doing business with the Court. This includes the translation of vital documents, notices, court orders, and other court documents. OCIS outsources translations to a translation agency and may also assign translations to OCIS staff and Interpreter Registry contract interpreters.

In 2023, OCIS produced 536 document translations compared to 621 in 2022, a decrease of 16%. The total translation word count in 2023 was 410,489, a decrease of 3% compared to the word count of 423,915 in 2022.

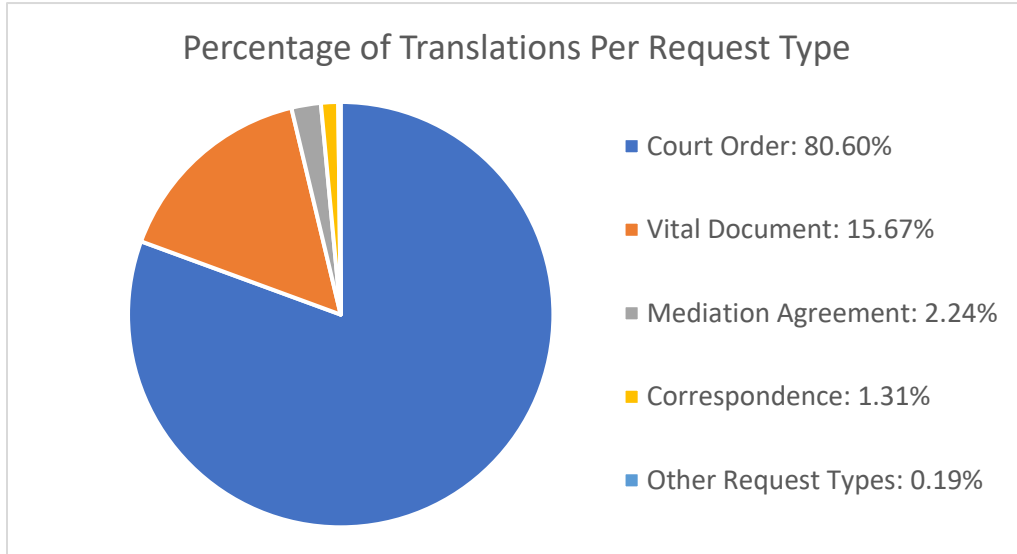
Document translation requests from the Family Court Operations Division accounted for approximately 80% of all requests followed by the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, the Domestic Violence Division, the Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court, and other divisions:²⁵



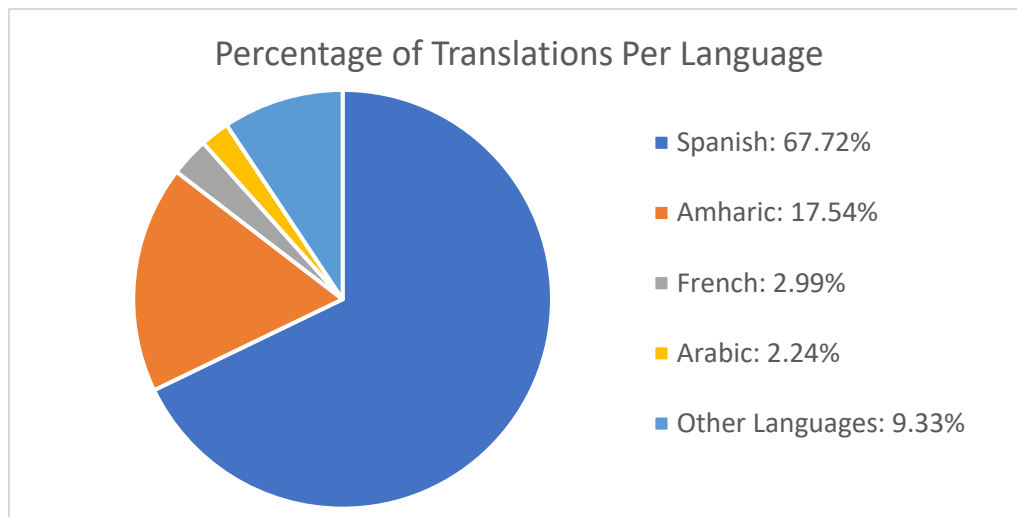
²⁴ Translations render a message from a written language text into another written language text.

²⁵ Other divisions that requested translations were the Civil Division and Court Social Services Division, each at less than 2% of all translation requests, and the Capital Projects and Facilities Management Division, Crime Victims Compensation Program, Special Operations Division, Executive Office, Criminal Division, DC Court of Appeals, and Probate Division, each at less than 1% of all translation requests.

Requests for translations of court orders accounted for 80% of all translation requests, followed by vital documents, mediation agreements, correspondence, and other request types:²⁶



In 2023, OCIS received requests for document translations in 18 languages. Spanish and Amharic remain the top two most requested languages for document translations at the Courts at 68% and 18% of all requests respectively, followed by French, Arabic, and other languages.²⁷



²⁶ Other request types were Applications, at less than 1% of all translations.

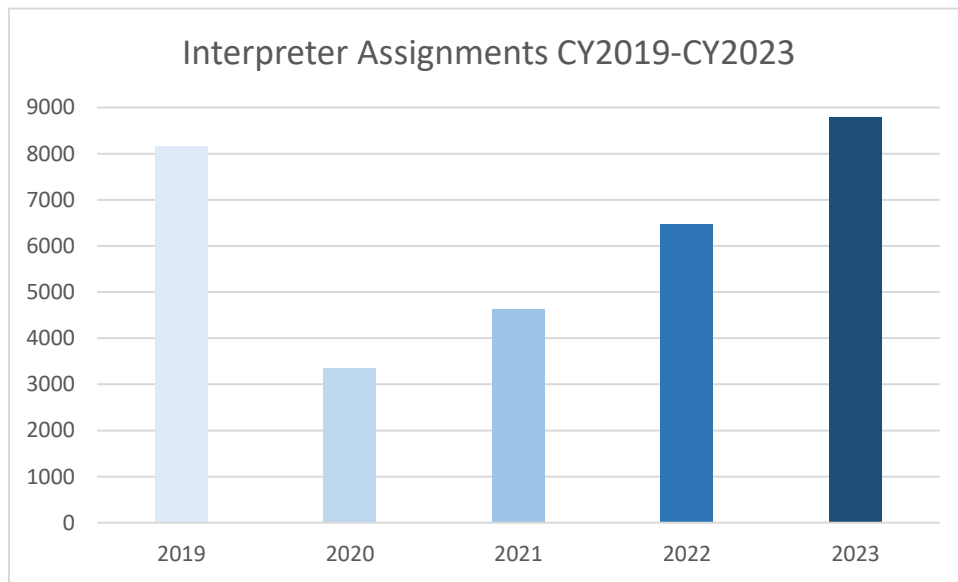
²⁷ Other languages were Indonesian, Korean, and Russian, at less than 2% of all translations, and Bengali, Mandarin, Portuguese, Creole (English), Creole (Haitian), Turkish, Italian, Nepali, Thai, Tigrinya, and Yoruba, each at less than 1% of all translations.

IV. INTERPRETER REGISTRY

The DC Courts' Interpreter Registry, launched in 2019, is a formal court interpreter testing and training program designed to improve the quality of interpretation services at the Court by standardizing interpreter testing, training, responsibilities, and scheduling.

In 2023, the Interpreter Registry included over 185 contract interpreters representing over 60 spoken and signed languages. OCIS manages the Interpreter Registry and coordinates the activities of the contract interpreters to fulfill the Courts' daily needs for interpretation services.

In 2023, OCIS assigned interpreters on 8,793²⁸ occasions to fulfill 7,291 requests for interpretation services in 58 distinct languages. This amounts to a 27% increase in the number of interpreter assignments compared to 6,462 in 2022 and surpasses the pre-pandemic levels of 2019.



²⁸ Two interpreters are assigned as a team to interpret for lengthy proceedings.

V. TESTING AND TRAINING SERVICES

OCIS provides testing and training services to ensure that court staff, judicial officers, and contract interpreters are familiar with the Courts' language access program and available language access services, and to ensure consistent best practices for delivery of services. Tests and training sessions are provided court-wide to safeguard LEP and deaf court users' meaningful access to court proceedings and services. In 2023, OCIS facilitated the presentation of a total of 46 workshops and training sessions for eight judicial officers, 109 court personnel, and 316 Interpreter Registry members. Additionally, OCIS continued to host the DC Courts' American Sign Language mentorship program in partnership with Gallaudet University.

A. DC Courts' Interpreter Registry

All Interpreter Registry members are required to complete an orientation workshop during their onboarding process that covers skills building, team interpretation, remote interpretation, ethics, practice standards and code of conduct, court procedures and protocols, the Web Interpreter and Translator System (WITS), policies, and procedures. To remain in good standing, interpreters on the Interpreter Registry must complete 12 hours of continuing education every two years on legal or interpretation matters. In 2023, OCIS facilitated 39 training sessions and workshops for Interpreter Registry members. In 2023, OCIS also administered two Amharic Court Interpreter Certification exams for DC Courts' Registry Amharic interpreters and 11 exams for candidates applying to join the Interpreter Registry.

B. American Sign Language Interpreters

The District of Columbia has over 20,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing residents, many of whom use ASL as their primary language. The Courts typically hold 20 to 30 proceedings per month that require ASL interpretation, and approximately 50 deaf jurors are summoned every year. However, the demand for ASL interpretation services at the Court for deaf jurors and court participants frequently exceeds the availability of certified ASL interpreters currently on the Interpreter Registry.

The shortage of ASL interpreters is not unique to the Courts but rather is a nationwide issue impacting courts across the country. Currently approximately 300 certified ASL interpreters in the United States have the requisite *Specialist Certificate: Legal (SC:L)* credential. The SC:L credential demonstrates specialized knowledge of legal settings and greater familiarity with language used in the legal system. The SC:L credential used to be issued by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), the national registry of professional sign language interpreters. However, in 2015, RID stopped administering the tests to earn the SC:L credential. This has disrupted the national pipeline of ASL interpreters with the requisite legal training and experience to work in court.

In 2022, OCIS designed a series of specialized workshops with the objective of providing certified ASL interpreters with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully work locally and across the country as court interpreters and to interpret for deaf jurors. No such training currently exists anywhere. The workshops are partially funded by a State Justice Institute Curriculum Adaptation & Training Grant and are a practical substitute for the SC:L credential which will enable ASL interpreters to qualify for the Interpreter Registry. Four workshops were held in 2023.

In 2023, OCIS also enrolled one student of ASL interpretation in the mentorship program established with Gallaudet University's Department of Interpretation and Translation. Gallaudet University is the nation's leading institution of higher education for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. The mentorship program provides a path for students of ASL interpretation to learn the requisite KSAs to work at the Courts and elsewhere.

C. Judicial Officers

Annually and upon request, the Language Access Coordinator provides an overview of the language access program and best practices for working with interpreters for all new judges during their on-boarding sessions. In 2023, the Language Access Coordinator provided three training sessions for eight new judges.

D. Court Staff, CJA, and CCAN Attorneys

The Language Access Advisory Committee developed a training called *Identifying Language Needs and Providing Language Assistance Services in a Court Setting* which the Courts implemented in 2019. This mandatory training has been incorporated into the on-boarding of all new employees at the Courts and provides an overview of the Courts' language access program, the role of an interpreter, best practices for working with an interpreter in person or remotely, and how to coordinate interpretation services with OCIS. In 2023, the Language Access Coordinator conducted two such training sessions for 109 new employees during their on-boarding process, as well as one training session for approximately 30 new law clerks. The Language Access Coordinator also facilitated a refresher course for four Probate Division judges.

CJA and CCAN attorneys who wish to join the Spanish attorney panels must first take and pass a language proficiency test administered by OCIS. In 2023, OCIS tested one attorney for the CJA Spanish panel and two attorneys for the CCAN Spanish attorney panel.

VI. LANGUAGE ACCESS RESOURCES

In 2023, OCIS continued to expand its data collection management system implemented in 2022 to improve and enhance data accuracy, transparency, and availability. The OCIS Program Officer collects and analyzes interpretation and translation data in monthly, quarterly, fiscal-year, and calendar-year reports to produce a detailed needs assessment tool. The data is utilized by the Language Access Coordinator, the Management and Program Analyst, and the Special Operations Division Director for quality control, hiring practices, budget requests, and recommendations to internal stakeholders based on data patterns and trends.

In 2023, key language access tools and information on the language access program were updated and maintained for the use of the public and the Courts' internal stakeholders through printed material, digital platforms, and multimedia content.

A Language Access tab that was added to the DC Courts' website at <https://www.dccourts.gov/services/language-access-services> continued to provide an overview of the Courts' language access services for the public, attorneys, and interpreters. The webpage

is designed to provide access to key language access tools as well as targeted information for the public, attorneys, and interpreters.

An OCIS Language Access Toolkit was designed for internal stakeholders and remained published on the Courts' intranet. The OCIS toolkit is a one-stop resource for judicial officers, law clerks, and court personnel that provides information on the language access program and the tools for obtaining language access services.

VII. CONCLUSION

In accordance with its mission to provide meaningful access to justice for all, OCIS continued to innovate in 2023. OCIS maintained a hybrid service model for staff and contract interpreters to provide both remote and onsite services. OCIS equipped three video remote interpreting rooms for onsite interpreters to utilize when assigned to remote hearings. OCIS regularly reviews and adjusts the hybrid service model to adapt to the Courts' changing language access needs.

In 2023, the demand for interpretation services increased by 27% (7,291 events) in comparison to 2022 (5,315 events) and surpassed the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 (6,506 events). While translation requests remained stable between 2022 and 2023, OCIS anticipates increasing demands as Superior Court improves on court forms and other information to benefit court users, including LEP persons.

To meet increasing demands for language access services, OCIS will need additional full-time employee positions to provide interpretation and translation services, perform translation quality review, develop ASL videos to benefit deaf court users, enable the more timely participation of deaf citizens in jury service, administer certification and qualification exams, design and offer language access and skills-building training sessions, recruit contract interpreters, and provide administrative and programmatic support.

Contract interpreters are in high demand in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, and OCIS competes directly with local agencies, such as the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and neighboring state and federal court systems, for the services of contract interpreters. To attract and retain contract interpreters to the DC Courts' Interpreter Registry

and ensure their continued availability, OCIS will need additional funding to ensure base rates are aligned with D.C. market conditions and local competitor agencies.

In 2024, OCIS will focus on securing necessary resources, including additional VRI rooms within the courthouse. OCIS will also work on developing and distributing surveys for a comprehensive needs assessment regarding the Courts' language access services in collaboration with the Language Access Advisory Committee. In addition, OCIS will collaborate with the Information and Technology Division to update WITS to enhance both the efficiency of delivering interpreting services and the effectiveness of data collection processes and reporting. Finally, OCIS will continue to utilize best practices, leverage technology, and collaborate with stakeholders to provide a high standard of language access services.

Appendix A

Number of Interpretation Requests Per Language		
Language	Number of Requests	Percentage
Spanish	4,794	65.75%
Deaf - American Sign Language (ASL)	694	9.52%
Amharic	528	7.24%
French	238	3.26%
Arabic	175	2.40%
Mandarin	149	2.04%
Tigrinya	84	1.15%
Korean	80	1.10%
Vietnamese	66	0.91%
Russian	50	0.69%
Deaf - Relay	45	0.62%
Bengali	31	0.43%
Portuguese	26	0.36%
Creole (Eng)	25	0.34%
Turkish	25	0.34%
Arabic (Moroccan)	22	0.30%
Indonesian	22	0.30%
Dari	15	0.21%
Persian	15	0.20%
Hindi	14	0.19%
Nepali	14	0.19%
German	12	0.16%
Polish	12	0.16%
Wolof	12	0.16%
Creole (Haitian)	11	0.15%
Swahili	11	0.15%
Igbo	8	0.11%
Thai	8	0.11%
Urdu	8	0.11%
Cantonese	7	0.10%
Kinyarwanda	7	0.10%
Romanian	7	0.10%
Tagalog	7	0.10%
Somali	6	0.08%
Yoruba	6	0.08%
Albanian	5	0.07%

Number of Interpretation Requests Per Language		
Language	Number of Requests	Percentage
Italian	5	0.07%
Lao	5	0.07%
Ewe	4	0.05%
Oromo	4	0.05%
Tibetan	4	0.05%
Japanese	3	0.04%
Pashtu	3	0.04%
Uyghur	3	0.04%
Bambara	2	0.03%
Bulgarian	2	0.03%
Burmese	2	0.03%
Farsi	2	0.03%
Fuzhou	2	0.03%
Ngambay	2	0.03%
Punjabi	2	0.03%
Croatian	1	0.01%
Georgian	1	0.01%
Greek	1	0.01%
Krio	1	0.01%
Kurdish	1	0.01%
Mongolian	1	0.01%
Twi	1	0.01%
Grand Total	7,291	