



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COURTS

Language Access Program 2024 Annual Report

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

February 10, 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Interpretation Services

In calendar year 2024, the Office of Court Interpreting Services (OCIS) assigned interpreters on 10,678 occasions to fulfill 9,073 interpretation events in 56 distinct languages. This represents a 21% increase in the number of interpreter assignments and a 24% increase in the number of events compared to 2023. Of all interpretation requests, 69.9% were for Spanish speakers. Other frequently requested languages included Amharic (8.8%), American Sign Language (ASL) (7.3%), French (2.4%), Arabic (2.3%), and Mandarin (1.2%). Interpreting services were provided for both in-person and remote hearings.

B. Translation Services

In 2024, OCIS processed 854 document translations compared to 536 in 2023, an increase of 59%. These translations included court orders, notices, summons, and forms. Spanish translations accounted for 79.5% of all translation requests and Amharic accounted for 11.7%.

C. Testing and Training Services

OCIS facilitated the administration of 16 exams and assessments for contract interpreters and 59 training events for contract interpreters, judicial officers, law clerks, and court personnel in 2024. OCIS held specialized workshops for ASL interpreters to prepare them for work at the DC Courts.

D. Language Access Resources

In 2024, 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 and updated 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 most recent Justice Index ranking for language access in 2021.¹ (The Courts previously ranked 16th in this category in the 2016 Justice Index.)

¹ <https://ncaj.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 of the District of Columbia. Over the years, the breadth of OCIS' services expanded, and its mandate was formally established by

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>

Administrative Orders 98-12, 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 of 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 Court's Language Access Coordinator on ways to implement and improve the D.C. Courts' Language Access Plan."

C. Services

The language access program is administered by OCIS,¹² except for the testing and hiring of Spanish and English bilingual employees,¹³ which falls under the purview of the Human Resources Division of the District of Columbia Courts. 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

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 currently 37 positions designated as bilingual (Spanish) within the Courts.

D. OCIS Organizational Structure

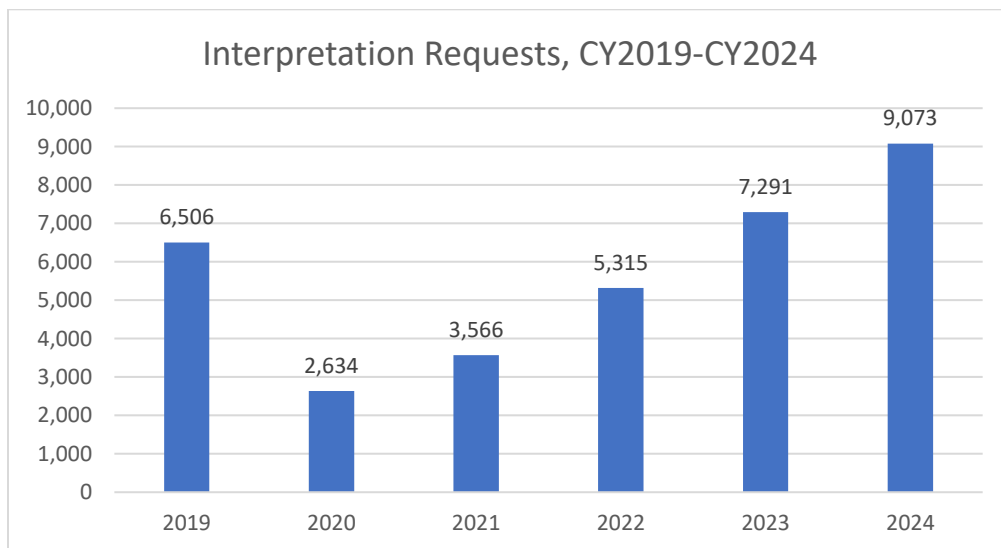
OCIS is a high-volume, fast-paced office that manages an Interpreter Registry of over 200 contractors and engages multiple independent agencies to provide interpretation and translation services to meet the Courts’ daily language access needs.

OCIS is staffed by five employees: a Language Access Coordinator who manages OCIS staff, operations, and the language access program; a Program Officer who administers the DC Courts’ Interpreter Registry; a Program Specialist who processes interpreter requests; and two Spanish Interpreters who provide interpretation services and administrative support.

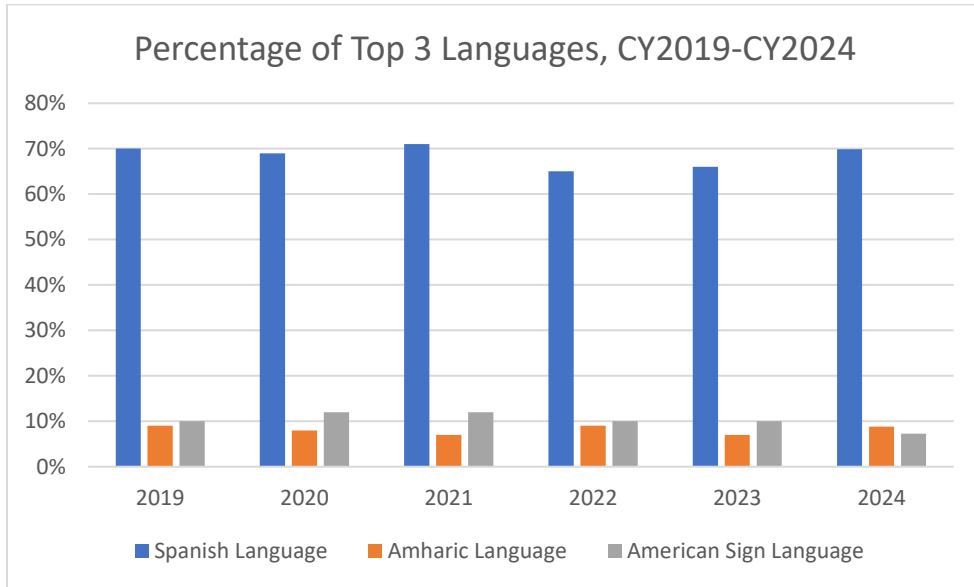
II. INTERPRETATION SERVICES

A. 2024 Interpretation Data

Interpretation services are provided by OCIS staff, DC Courts’ Interpreter Registry contract interpreters, and independent interpretation agencies. In 2024, OCIS fulfilled 9,073 requests for interpretation services in 56 distinct languages (see Appendix A). This is an increase from the number of interpretation requests received in each of the previous four years, and represents a 39% increase in interpretation requests compared to the pre-pandemic requests in 2019.



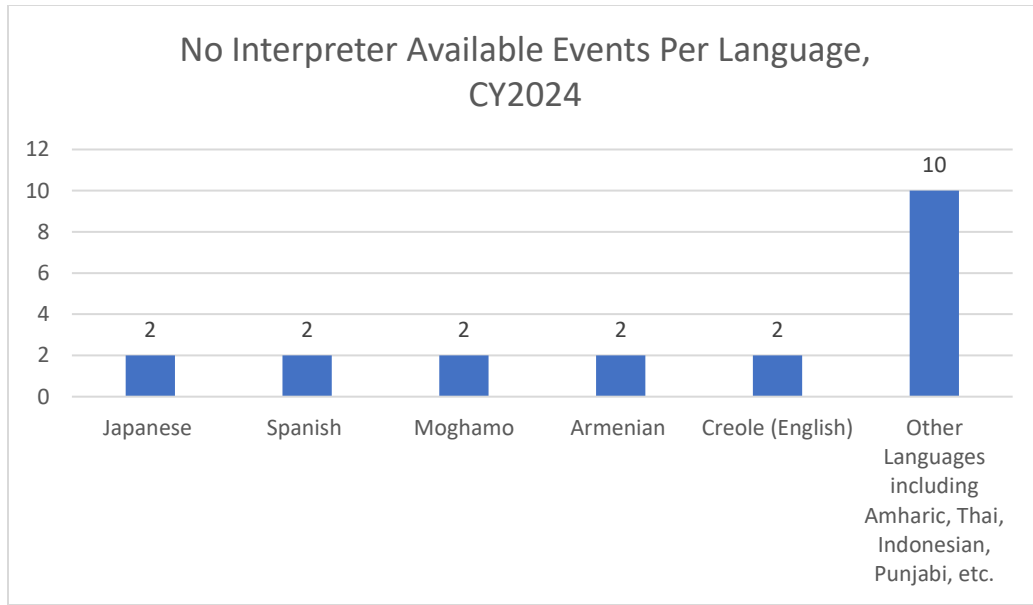
As in previous years, the three most requested languages in 2024 were Spanish, Amharic, and ASL. Spanish consistently represents the vast majority of requests at approximately 70%.



The data for ASL requests includes interpretation services provided to deaf prospective jurors summoned for jury service. In 2024, 49 deaf jurors were issued summonses to report for jury duty.

In 2024, OCIS was unable to provide interpreters for 20 events (0.2% 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 hearing date.¹⁴

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



B. Delivery of Interpretation Services

During 2024, OCIS continued to innovate, leverage technology, and implement effective processes and procedures to ensure timely and efficient interpretation services for virtual,¹⁵ remote,¹⁶ hybrid,¹⁷ and in-person¹⁸ proceedings.

OCIS has three video remote interpretation (VRI) rooms for onsite¹⁹ interpreters in the courthouse. The VRI rooms are equipped with desktop computers and necessary equipment for the 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 or deaf persons. Each VRI room has a back-up laptop available for interpreters to use in the event they encounter technical difficulties logging into the desktop computers.

Onsite interpretation requests steadily increased during the course of 2024 in direct correlation with the increase in overall requests. OCIS fulfilled 5,538 (61.04%) onsite requests

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

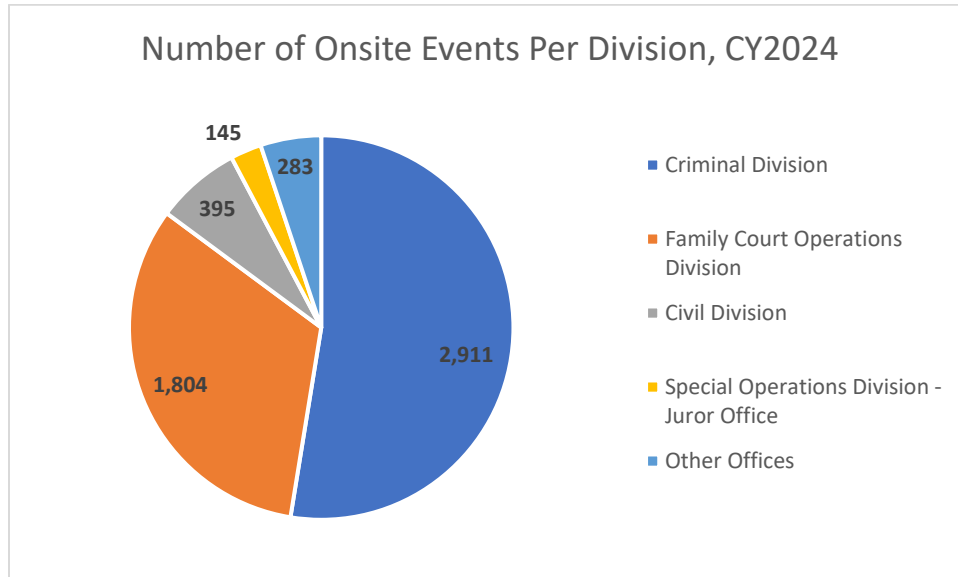
¹⁶ <https://www.dccourts.gov/reimaginingdcsc>

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.

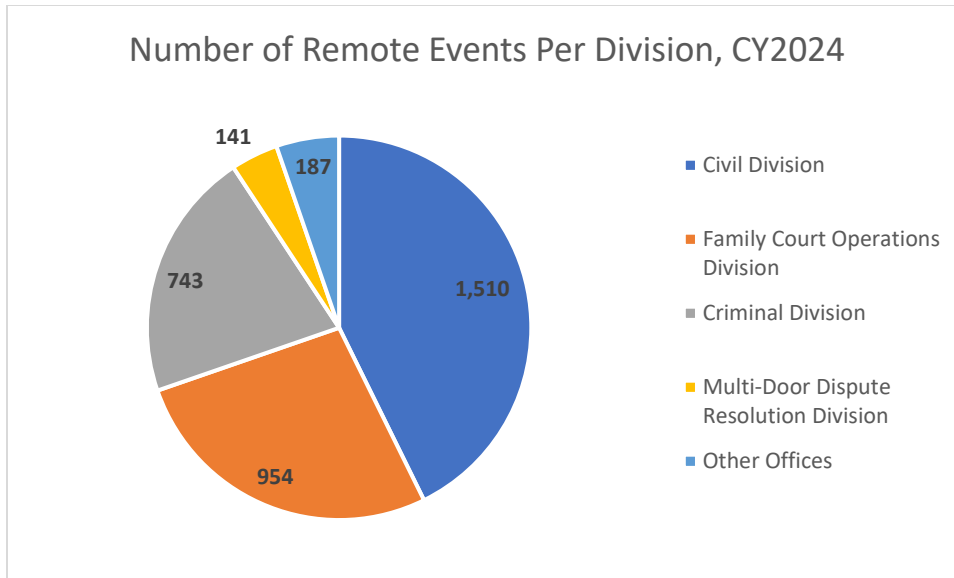
and 3,535 (38.96%) remote requests. The majority of onsite interpretation events took place in the Criminal Division, followed by the Family Court Operations Division, Civil Division, Special Operations Division, Domestic Violence Division, and other offices:²⁰



The majority of remote interpretation events took place in the Civil Division, followed by the Family Court Operations Division, Criminal Division, Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, and other offices:²¹

²⁰ Other areas where onsite interpretation events took place were the Probate Division, Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, Executive Office, Crime Victims Compensation Program, Center for Education and Training, Court Reporting Division, and Office of the Auditor Master, each at less than 1% of all onsite interpretation events.

²¹ Other areas where remote interpretation events took place were the Domestic Violence Division, Probate Division, Special Operations Division, Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court, Crime Victims Compensation Program, and the DC Court of Appeals, each at less than 3% of all remote interpretation events.



III. TRANSLATION SERVICES

A. 2024 Translation Data

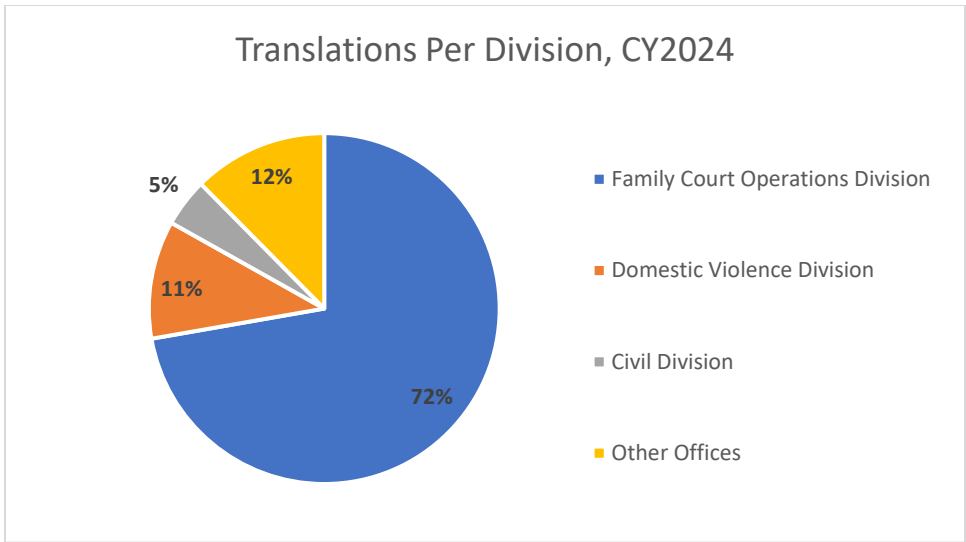
It is the Courts' policy to provide translation²² services free of charge to assist LEP persons doing business with the Courts. This includes the translation of vital documents, notices, court orders, and other court documents. OCIS outsources translations to a translation agency and may also assign translations to OCIS staff and Interpreter Registry contract interpreters.

In 2024, OCIS produced 854 document translations compared to 536 in 2023, an increase of 59%. The total translation word count in 2024 was 576,825, an increase of 41% compared to the word count of 410,489 in 2023.

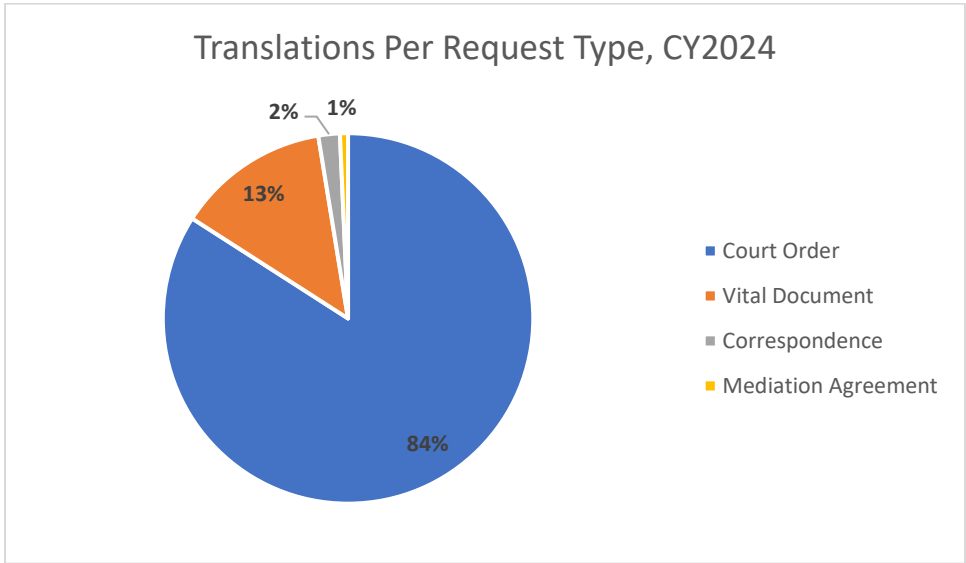
Document translation requests from the Family Court Operations Division accounted for approximately 72% of all requests, followed by the Domestic Violence Division, Civil Division, and other offices:²³

²² Translations render a message from a written language text into another written language text.

²³ Other offices that requested translations were the Office of the Clerk of the Superior Court, Executive Office, Court Social Services Division, Capital Projects and Facilities Management Division, Crime Victims Compensation Program, Special Operations Division, Executive Office, Criminal Division, DC Court of Appeals, Strategic Management Division, Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division, and Probate Division, each at less than 3% of all translation requests.

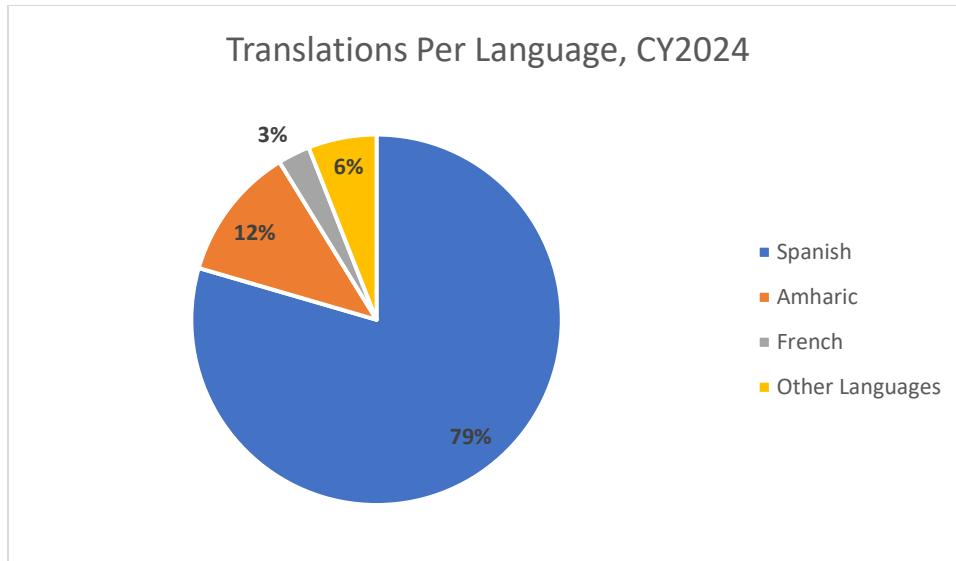


Requests for translations of court orders accounted for 84% of all translation requests, followed by vital documents (e.g., applications, forms, and notices), correspondence, and mediation agreements:



In 2024, OCIS received requests for document translations in 20 languages. Spanish and Amharic remain the top two most requested languages for document translations at the Courts at 79.5% and 11.7% of all requests respectively, followed by French and other languages.²⁴

²⁴ Other languages were Ukrainian, Indonesian, Turkish, Arabic, Creole (English), Tagalog, Portuguese, Thai, Korean, Vietnamese, Wolof, Mandarin, Cantonese, Italian, Oromo, and Lingala, each at less than 1% of all translations.



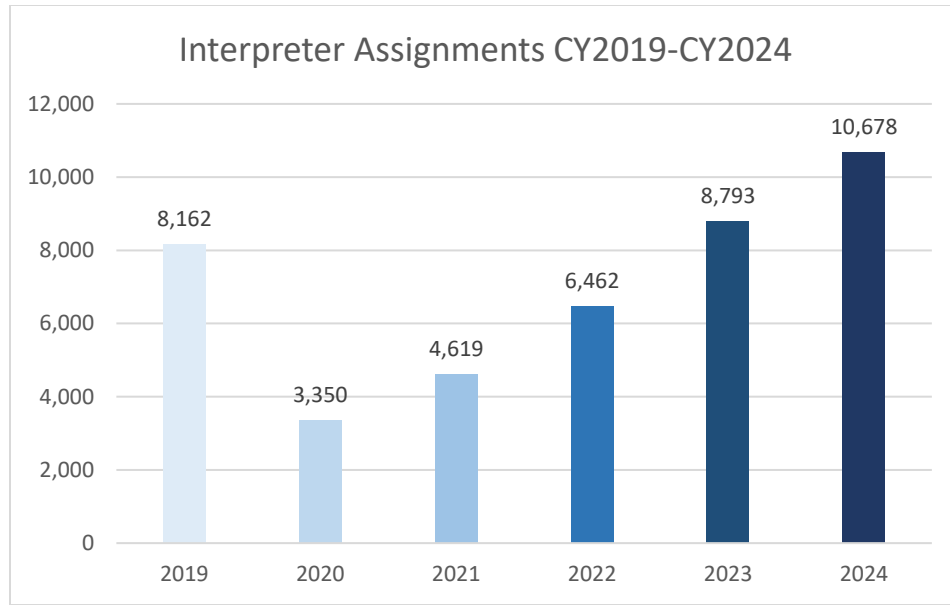
IV. INTERPRETER REGISTRY

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 Courts by standardizing interpreter testing, training, responsibilities, and scheduling.

In 2024, the Interpreter Registry increased to 205 contract interpreters from 185 in 2023, 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 2024, OCIS assigned interpreters on 10,678²⁵ occasions to fulfill 9,073 requests for interpretation services in 56 distinct languages. This amounts to a 21.4% increase in the number of interpreter assignments compared to 8,793 in 2023 and surpasses the pre-pandemic levels of 2019.

²⁵ Two interpreters are assigned as a team to interpret for lengthy proceedings.



V. TESTING AND TRAINING SERVICES

OCIS offers comprehensive testing and training services to ensure that court staff, judicial officers, and contract interpreters are well-versed in the Courts’ language access program and services. These efforts are designed to promote consistent, high-quality service delivery and support meaningful access for LEP and deaf court users. In 2024, OCIS facilitated the presentation of 59 workshops and training sessions for Interpreter Registry members, judicial officers, court employees, and law clerks.

A. DC Courts’ Interpreter Registry

All Interpreter Registry members are required to complete an orientation workshop during their onboarding process that covers the role of the court interpreter, remote interpretation, ethics, practice standards and code of conduct, court procedures and protocols, the Web Interpreter and Translator System (WITS), and OCIS policies. 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 2024, OCIS facilitated 48 training sessions and workshops for Interpreter Registry members. A total of 148 Registry members attended, some of whom participated in multiple training sessions. In 2024, OCIS also

administered the Amharic Court Interpreter Certification exam to two candidates and language proficiency exams to 14 candidates applying to join the Interpreter Registry.

B. 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 to all new judges during their on-boarding sessions. In 2024, the Language Access Coordinator conducted three training sessions for ten new judges and three additional refresher training sessions for seasoned judges in the Criminal, Probate, and Civil Divisions.

C. Court Employees and Law Clerks

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 2024, OCIS conducted four such training sessions for 137 employees, as well as one training session for approximately 30 new law clerks.

VI. LANGUAGE ACCESS RESOURCES

In 2024, OCIS collaborated with the Information Technology Division to upgrade and expand its data management system, the Web Interpreter and Translator System. 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 2024, language access tools and information about the language access program were updated and maintained for use by 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 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 and updated 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 2024. OCIS maintained a hybrid service model for staff and contract interpreters to provide both remote and onsite services. OCIS maintained three video remote interpreting rooms for onsite interpreters to utilize when assigned to remote hearings.

In 2024, the demand for interpretation services increased by 24% (9,073 events) compared to 2023 (7,291 events) and surpassed the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 (6,506 events). Translation requests also increased by 59% between 2023 (536 document translations) and 2024 (854 document translations), and OCIS anticipates that demand will continue to rise as the Superior Court of the District of Columbia improves court forms and other information to benefit court users, including LEP persons.

To meet increasing demands for language access services, additional full-time employee positions are needed to provide interpretation and translation services, perform translation quality review, 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, DC, 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, additional funding is needed to align base rates, as well as mileage, parking, and other payments, with DC market conditions and local competitor agencies.

In 2025, OCIS will focus on setting up additional VRI rooms within the courthouse. In addition, OCIS will continue to collaborate with the Information 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 offer training sessions, utilize best practices, leverage technology, and collaborate with stakeholders to provide a high standard of language access services.

Appendix A

Number of Interpretation Requests Fulfilled Per Language		
Language	Number of Requests	Percentage
Spanish	6,343	69.91%
Amharic	800	8.82%
American Sign Language	659	7.26%
French	218	2.40%
Arabic	210	2.31%
Mandarin	112	1.23%
Deaf - Relay	76	0.84%
Korean	67	0.74%
Vietnamese	65	0.72%
Tigrinya	62	0.68%
Russian	58	0.64%
Turkish	31	0.34%
Portuguese	26	0.29%
Creole (English)	25	0.28%
Bengali	25	0.28%
Oromo	24	0.26%
Arabic (Moroccan)	20	0.22%
Persian	20	0.22%
Polish	18	0.20%
Tagalog	17	0.19%
Urdu	17	0.19%
Georgian	17	0.19%
Thai	13	0.14%
Wolof	10	0.11%
Ukrainian	10	0.11%
Italian	9	0.10%
Nepali	9	0.10%
Cantonese	8	0.09%
Creole (Haitian)	8	0.09%
Japanese	8	0.09%
Hindi	7	0.08%
Moghamo	7	0.08%
German	6	0.07%
Bafut	6	0.07%
Somali	5	0.06%
Dari	5	0.06%
Yoruba	5	0.06%
Indonesian	5	0.06%

Number of Interpretation Requests Fulfilled Per Language		
Language	Number of Requests	Percentage
Romanian	4	0.04%
Pashtu	4	0.04%
Mongolian	4	0.04%
Hausa	3	0.03%
Punjabi	3	0.03%
Twi	3	0.03%
Lao	3	0.03%
Gujarati	2	0.02%
Armenian	2	0.02%
Burmese	2	0.02%
Tibetan	2	0.02%
Chichewa	2	0.02%
Pidgin English	2	0.02%
Bulgarian	2	0.02%
Akan	1	0.01%
Farsi	1	0.01%
Patois	1	0.01%
Mandinka	1	0.01%
Grand Total	9,073	100.00%