MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL
BRANCH

SIBLEY COUNTY DISTRICT COURT
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) PLAN

I. LEGAL BASIS AND PURPOSE

This document serves as the plan for Sibley County District Court to provide services to LEP individuals in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; 45 C.F.R. § 80 et seq; and 28 C.F.R. § 42 et seq. The purpose of this plan is to provide a framework for the provision of timely and reasonable language assistance to LEP persons who come in contact with Sibley County District Court.

This LEP Plan was developed to ensure equal access to court services for persons with limited English proficiency and hearing impaired persons. Although deaf and hard of hearing individuals are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) rather than Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, they have been included in this plan insofar as they relate to the Minnesota Judicial Branch Court Interpreter Program.

II. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A. Statewide

The State of Minnesota provides court services to a wide range of persons, including people who do not speak English or who are hearing impaired. Service providers include the Minnesota Supreme Court, the Court of Appeals and trial courts in the ten judicial districts.

According to the Minnesota Court Interpreter Program, which tracks court interpreter usage, the most widely used languages for interpreters in Minnesota courts in **2010** were (in descending order of frequency):

1. Spanish
2. Somali
3. Hmong
4. American Sign Language
5. Vietnamese

B. Sibley County District Court

Sibley County District Court will make every effort to provide service to all LEP persons. However, the following list shows the languages that are most frequently used in the area.

- Spanish
- Anuak
- Hmong

  This information is based on data from the Minnesota Court Interpreter Program and the summary report specific to Sibley County and personal experience.

III. LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

A. Interpreters Used In the Courtroom

By Minnesota statute, it is "the policy of this State that the constitutional rights of persons disabled in communication cannot be fully protected unless qualified interpreters are available to assist them in legal proceedings." Minn. Stat. § 611.30 (2009). A person "disabled in communication" is one who, because of difficulty in speaking or comprehending the English language, is unable to fully understand the proceedings in which the person is required to participate, or when named as a party to a legal proceeding, is unable by reason of the deficiency to obtain due process of law. Minn. Stat. §§ 546.42; 611.31 (2009).

In the Sibley County District Court, sign language interpreters will be provided at court expense for all deaf court customers in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Spoken language interpreters will be provided at no cost to the court customers who are "disabled in communication" under the following circumstances:

- Interpreters will be provided at no cost for litigants and witnesses in criminal hearings;
- Interpreters will be provided at no cost for litigants and witnesses in civil hearings
- Interpreters will be provided at no cost for litigants and witnesses in juvenile hearings; and
- Interpreters will be provided at no cost for litigants and witnesses in child support hearings at the discretion of the officiating judge.

Alternatively, Minnesota Statutes Section 611.33, subd. 3 requires that "[p]ayments for any activities requiring interpreter services on behalf of law enforcement, the board of public defense, prosecutors, or corrections agents other than court appearances is the responsibility of the agency that requested the services."

1. Determining the Need for an Interpreter in the Courtroom

There are various ways that the Sibley County District Court will determine whether an LEP court customer needs an interpreter for a court hearing. First, the LEP person may request an interpreter. The Sibley County District Court displays a sign translated into Minnesota's eleven most frequently used languages which states: "*You may have the right to a court-appointed interpreter in a court case. Please ask someone at the court information desk*." The Sibley County District Court displays this sign at the following location: Posted on the bulletin board located right in front of the Court Administration Office and at the front counter.

Second, court personnel and judges may determine that an interpreter is appropriate for a court hearing. Many people who need an interpreter will not request one because they do not realize that interpreters are available, or because they do not recognize the level of English proficiency or communication skills needed to understand the court proceeding. Therefore, when it appears that an

individual has any difficulty communicating, the court administrator or judge should err on the side of providing an interpreter to ensure full access to the courts.

Third, the Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS), which is the statewide case management system, will track interpreter needs through case records and party records. Case record interpreter flags will assist staff in making sure that they know an interpreter is needed for the next hearing on a particular case. Party record interpreter information stays with the party and would be available statewide for future filings and party search results for that same individual.

Finally, outside agencies such as probation, attorneys, social workers or correctional facilities notify the court about an LEP individual's need for an interpreter for an upcoming a court hearing using the following methods: This information has been shared with these agencies through meetings, emails and letter notification. Sibley County justice partners are aware of the processes established to communicate the needs of LEP individuals.

2. Court Interpreter Qualifications

The Sibley County District Court hires interpreters for courtroom hearings in compliance with the rules and policies set forth by the Minnesota Court Interpreter Program (CIP) and Rule 8 of the General Rules of Practice for the District Courts. The CIP maintains a statewide roster of interpreters who may work in the courts. This roster is available to court staff on CourtNet and the Minnesota Judicial Branch website. Interpreters on the roster have passed the court's ethics exam, attended an orientation session and signed a sworn affidavit of professional responsibility. In accordance with Rule 8, the Sibley County District Court appoints "certified" interpreters when available. To be certified, an interpreter must first meet the requirements to be on the roster, and secondly must pass a rigorous exam testing linguistic and interpreting skills. Minnesota court certified interpreters are currently available in the following languages: Spanish, Somali, Hmong, American Sign Language, Vietnamese, Russian, Mandarin, French and Lao. When the Sibley County District Court has made a "diligent" effort to find a certified court interpreter and none is available, the Sibley County District Court then seeks a non-certified court interpreter who is on the statewide roster.

In compliance with Rule 8, the Sibley County District Court appoints non-certified interpreters who are not listed on the roster only when certified and rostered interpreters are unavailable. Whenever a non-certified interpreter is used in the courtroom, judges are encouraged to inquire into the interpreter's skills, professional experience, and potential conflicts of interest.

Bilingual staff members who are not on the statewide roster are never used to interpret in court. However, they may assist in securing an interpreter if necessary.

More information on court interpreters is available to court personnel in the "Best Practices Manual on Interpreters in the Minnesota State Court System," published and maintained by the State Court Administrator's Office, available at http://www.mncourts.gov/?page=463 .

B. Spoken Language Services Outside The Courtroom

The Sibley County District Court is also responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure that LEP individuals have meaningful access to services outside the courtroom. This is perhaps the most challenging situation facing court staff, because in most situations they are charged with assisting LEP individuals without an interpreter. LEP individuals may come in contact with court personnel via the phone, counter, interviews for public defender eligibility, orders for protection, ITV or other means. To that end, the Sibley County District Court has the following resources to help LEP individuals and court staff communicate with each other:

- The Sibley County Court has access to bilingual employees that speak Spanish in other County Departments. When LEP customers seek our assistance outside the courtroom, we try to meet their needs by using the language skills of other Sibley County employees based on their availability.
- For face-to-face encounters, as well as telephone conversations, Sibley County uses the language line when interpreters are not immediately available.
- When court staff does not know what language a customer is speaking, they utilize "I speak" cards which are available in forty languages.
- For staff who have some knowledge of the Spanish language, they may consult the Spanish/English glossary developed by the North Carolina courts.
- The Sibley County Court also has some common phrases/questions translated into the most common language, Spanish, to assist with customers that may come to the counter.

C. Translated Forms & Documents

The Minnesota Courts understand the importance of translating forms and documents so that LEP individuals have greater access to the courts' services. The Sibley County District Court currently has the following forms translated into commonly used languages:

- Criminal Court Forms have been translated into Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Russian, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. These forms include Rule 15 Plea Petitions (Felony and Gross Misdemeanor); Felony, Gross Misdemeanor, Misdemeanor, and Petty Misdemeanor Statements of Rights; Gross Misdemeanor DUI Statement of Rights; Probation Violation Statement of Rights

- Statement of Rights for First Court Appearance on Paternity Proceedings: Cambodian, Hmong, Lao, Russian, Somali and Spanish

These translated forms are available on CourtNet for internal use, and available to the general public at: http://www.mncourts.gov/default.aspx?page=513

When interpreters are hired for hearings, they are expected to provide sight translations for corresponding documentation to LEP individuals.

IV. TRAINING

The Minnesota Courts are committed to providing LEP training opportunities for all staff members who come in contact with LEP individuals. All new Minnesota Judicial Branch employees undergo training on using interpreters and serving LEP customers at the mandatory Judicial Branch Orientation. Additionally, all new judges elected or appointed to the state court bench are trained on interpreter issues at the New Judge Orientation. Training opportunities specifically provided in the Sibley County District Court include:

- Staff are instructed about LEP policies and procedures, as described in this LEP Plan, on an annual basis.
- Front-line staff are required to annually review "Breaking Down the Language Barrier" a video training tool provided by the Department of Justice.
- Training will be offered by the Educational and Organizational Development Department of the State Court Administrator's Office on ways to better identify LEP individuals, identify linguistic needs, and communicate despite language barriers.
- Access to Self-Help Desk for completing court forms. There are also bilingual staff available through the self-help desk phone system.

V. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND EVALUATION OF LEP PLAN

A. LEP Plan Approval & Notification

The Sibley County District Court's LEP Plan has been approved by the District Administrator, and a copy has been forwarded to the State Court Administrator's Office (SCAO). Any revisions to the plan shall be submitted to the District Administrator for approval, and then forwarded to the SCAO. Copies of Sibley County District Court's LEP plan will be provided upon request. In addition, Sibley County District Court will post this Plan on its website, and the SCAO will post it on the Minnesota Judicial Branch's public website.

B. Evaluation of the LEP Plan

The Sibley County District Court will review this Plan on a periodic basis to determine whether changes are required. This assessment may be done by tracking the number of interpreters requested by language in the courts, or by other methods.

Any revisions made to the Plan will be communicated to all court personnel, and an updated version of the plan will be posted on the court's website. Additionally, it will be posted on the Judicial Branch's public website.

Each year the statewide Court Interpreter Program Coordinator will coordinate with the judicial district interpreter liaisons to review the effectiveness of the LEP Plan. The evaluation will include identification of any problem areas and development of required corrective action strategies. Elements of the evaluation may include:

- Number of LEP persons requesting court interpreters in Minnesota Courts;
- Assessment of current language needs to determine if additional services or translated materials should be provided;

- Assessing whether staff members adequately understand LEP policies and procedures and how to carry them out; and
- Gathering feedback from LEP communities around the state.

The effective date of this LEP plan is **September 1, 2010.**

LEP Contact Person

State Contact:
Melanie Larsen Sinouthasy
Diversity Specialist and LEP Coordinator
25 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155
Melanie.Sinouthasy@courts.state.mn.us
Tel: 651-284-4343

Local Contact:
Karen V. Messner
Court Administrator
Sibley County District Court
400 Court Avenue, P.O. Box 867
Gaylord, MN 55334
Karen.messner@courts.state.mn.us
Tel: 507-237-4053