

Colorado Legislative Branch Recommendations for Language Access Services

January 2024

1. PURPOSE

It is the policy of the Colorado General Assembly that the official legislative proceedings of the legislative branch of the Colorado state government be accessible to and usable by every person. Ideally, this should include language accessibility.

Accessible language is communication that includes everyone, including people who speak English as a second language and who may need assistance overcoming language barriers. Language accessibility is necessary to help promote inclusivity and ensure Colorado constituents have equal access and opportunities to participate in committee hearings.

Of the nearly 5.8 million people who live in Colorado, over 900,000 residents speak a non-English language in their homes. In addition, nearly 390,000 residents are classified as having limited English proficiency. Those living in Colorado who do not speak English or have limited English proficiency are first and foremost Colorado residents and constituents. It is our duty to provide them with the chance to testify in official committee hearings under fair conditions. This includes but is not limited to, being provided with a qualified interpreter for full language accessibility.

2. LANGUAGE COORDINATOR

The Language Coordinator(s) will be staff in the Legislative Council Staff (LCS) agency. Requests for language interpretation must be made through the [Witness Sign-up form](#) at least two business days before the time the service is needed- see “Availability of Services” for more information on request deadlines. LCS must provide translation of the Witness Sign-up form in the top five languages spoken in Colorado other than English, as reported by the Spring Institute; Spanish, Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese), German, Vietnamese, and French. The Witness Sign-up form must be modified to collect the necessary information to complete the service request, including the language interpretation needed. When language interpretation is needed the requestor will be prompted to select from the top five languages spoken in Colorado. Requestors who need language interpretation in a different language not listed from the top five languages can select the “other” option and indicate the language they are requesting. The

requestor should receive a confirmation email for testimony sign-up in the preferred language indicated.

3. AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES

Services for those requesting language assistance are only available for committee hearings in which testimonies will take place, such as committee meetings where public comment is heard in the House of Representatives or Senate. Translation services are not currently available for full legislative proceedings at which legislative action may be taken or non-legislative proceedings, such as individual or stakeholder meetings with legislators, town hall meetings, or meetings with legislative staff.

Requests for language interpretation must be made at least two business days before the time the service is needed. For example, a request for an interpreter for a Monday committee hearing must be made no later than 4:00 p.m. of the preceding Thursday. Because the Colorado General Assembly relies on outside vendors to provide these services, requests for services made with less notice may result in an inability to provide the service being requested.

After receiving the request for interpretation from the General Assembly Witness Sign-up form the appropriate legislative staff will contact a provider. If one provider is unavailable, LCS should secure services from an alternate provider. The appropriate legislative staff will work cooperatively with a person making a request to provide a service under this policy that will most satisfactorily meet the requestor's needs, to the extent the service is available in the area and there is sufficient time within which to arrange for the service.

Advance notice will assist in ensuring the timeliness of a response to requests for Services. Legislative staff will do their best to accommodate a request for services on less notice than specified above, but the requestor should be aware that difficulties in scheduling certain services may be encountered in accommodating a request. Staff's ability to furnish services will depend on the request, the number of requests for services at any given time, and the workload of public and private sources upon whom staff must depend for the provision of certain services.

4. TYPES OF SERVICES AVAILABLE:

A member of the general public may arrange for any of the following types of services by submitting their request via the Witness Sign-up form. In the case that modification needs to be made to the request, the requestor may contact the Language Coordinator with Legislative Council Staff.

Qualified Interpreters. A person requesting an interpreter shall specifically indicate the legislative purpose, the type of official legislative proceeding, and the date and time if known, during which an interpreter will be required.

Interpreter over Zoom. A person requesting an interpreter has the option of requesting the interpreter to attend over Zoom. This option is available to persons attending an official committee hearing in person and to persons attending over Zoom.

Legislative Video and Audio. Live and archived electronic audio and video recordings of legislative meetings, hearings, and other formal legislative proceedings are accessible on the Colorado General Assembly's website <https://www.leg.colorado.gov>. Closed captioning may be available in live audio and video broadcasts. Committee hearings are not subject to full interpretation and/or translation.

5. AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

Services will be provided on a first-come first-serve basis to members of the public. Legislative Council Staff should provide language interpretation services for the duration of the Second Regular Session of the 74th General Assembly. In the case funds deplete, a supplemental appropriation request should be made to fill the need for services. A record of requests for services should be kept by LCS in order to project future needs.