

CHAPTER 2.42. INTERPRETERS IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS (Deaf and Hearing Impaired) January, 2008

2.42.010. Legislative declaration – Intent. It is hereby declared to be the policy of this state to secure the constitutional rights of deaf persons and of other persons who, because of impairment of hearing or speech, are unable to readily understand or communicate the spoken English language, and who consequently cannot be fully protected in legal proceedings unless qualified interpreters are available to assist them.

It is the intent of the legislature in the passage of this chapter to provide for the appointment of such interpreters.

2.42.050. Oath. Every qualified interpreter appointed under this chapter in a judicial or administrative proceeding shall, before beginning to interpret, take an oath that a true interpretation will be made to the person being examined of all the proceedings in a manner which the person understands, and that the interpreter will repeat the statements of the person being examined to the court or other agency conducting the proceedings, to the best of the interpreter's skill and judgment.

2.42.110. Definitions. As used in this chapter, the following terms have the meanings indicated unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Impaired person" means a person who, because of a hearing or speech impairment, cannot readily understand or communicate in spoken language; and includes persons who are deaf, deaf and blind, speech impaired, or hard of hearing.

(2) "Qualified interpreter" means a visual language interpreter who is certified by the state or is certified by the registry of interpreters for the deaf to hold the comprehensive skills certificate or both certificates of interpretation and transliteration, or an interpreter who can readily translate statements of speech impaired persons into spoken language.

(3) "Intermediary interpreter" means a hearing impaired interpreter who holds a reverse skills certificate by the state or is certified by the registry of interpreters for the deaf with a reverse skills certificate, who meets the requirements of RCW 2.42.130, and who is able to assist in providing an accurate interpretation between spoken and sign language or between variants of sign language by acting as an intermediary between a hearing impaired person and a qualified hearing interpreter.

(4) "Appointing authority" means the presiding officer or similar official of any court, department, board, commission, agency, licensing authority, or legislative body of the state or of any political subdivision.

2.42.120. Appointment, pay. (1) If a hearing impaired person is a party or witness at any stage of a judicial or quasi-judicial proceeding in the state or in a political subdivision, including but not limited to civil and criminal court proceedings, grand jury proceedings, proceedings before a magistrate, juvenile proceedings, adoption proceedings, mental health commitment proceedings,

and any proceeding in which a hearing impaired person may be subject to confinement or criminal sanction, the appointing authority shall appoint and pay for a qualified interpreter to interpret the proceedings.

(2) If the parent, guardian, or custodian of a juvenile brought before a court is hearing impaired, the appointing authority shall appoint and pay for a qualified interpreter to interpret the proceedings.

(3) If a hearing impaired person participates in a program or activity ordered by a court as part of the sentence or order of disposition, required as part of a diversion agreement or deferred prosecution program, or required as a condition of probation or parole, the appointing authority shall appoint and pay for a qualified interpreter to interpret exchange of information during the program or activity.

(4) If a law enforcement agency conducts a criminal investigation involving the interviewing of a hearing impaired person, whether as a victim, witness, or suspect, the appointing authority shall appoint and pay for a qualified interpreter throughout the investigation. Whenever a law enforcement agency conducts a criminal investigation involving the interviewing of a minor child whose parent, guardian, or custodian is hearing impaired, whether as a victim, witness, or suspect, the appointing authority shall appoint and pay for a qualified interpreter throughout the investigation. No employee of the law enforcement agency who has responsibilities other than interpreting may be appointed as the qualified interpreter.

(5) If a hearing impaired person is arrested for an alleged violation of a criminal law the arresting officer or the officer's supervisor shall, at the earliest possible time, procure and arrange payment for a qualified interpreter for any notification of rights, warning, interrogation, or taking of a statement. No employee of the law enforcement agency who has responsibilities other than interpreting may be appointed as the qualified interpreter.

(6) Where it is the policy and practice of a court of this state or of a political subdivision to appoint and pay counsel for persons who are indigent, the appointing authority shall appoint and pay for a qualified interpreter for hearing impaired persons to facilitate communication with counsel in all phases of the preparation and presentation of the case.

2.42.130. Source of interpreters, qualifications. (1) If a qualified interpreter for a hearing impaired person is required, the appointing authority shall request a qualified interpreter and/or an intermediary interpreter through the department of social and health services, office of deaf services, or through any community center for hearing impaired persons which operates an interpreter referral service. The office of deaf services and these community centers shall maintain an up-to-date list or lists of interpreters that are certified by the state and/or by the registry of interpreters for the deaf.

(2) The appointing authority shall make a preliminary determination, on the basis of testimony or stated needs of the hearing impaired person, that the interpreter is able in that particular proceeding, program, or activity to interpret accurately all communication to and from the hearing impaired person. If at any time during the proceeding, program, or activity, in the

opinion of the hearing impaired person or a qualified observer, the interpreter does not provide accurate, impartial, and effective communication with the hearing impaired person the appointing authority shall appoint another qualified interpreter. No otherwise qualified interpreter who is a relative of any participant in the proceeding may be appointed.

2.42.140. Intermediary interpreter, when. If the communication mode or language of the hearing impaired person is not readily interpretable, the interpreter or hearing impaired person shall notify the appointing authority who shall appoint and pay an intermediary interpreter to assist the qualified interpreter.

2.42.150. Waiver of right to interpreter. (1) The right to a qualified interpreter may not be waived except when:

(a) A hearing impaired person requests a waiver through the use of a qualified interpreter;

(b) The counsel, if any, of the hearing impaired person consents; and

(c) The appointing authority determines that the waiver has been made knowingly, voluntarily, and intelligently.

(2) Waiver of a qualified interpreter shall not preclude the hearing impaired person from claiming his or her right to a qualified interpreter at a later time during the proceeding, program, or activity.

2.42.160. Privileged communication. (1) A qualified and/or intermediary interpreter shall not, without the written consent of the parties to the communication, be examined as to any communication the interpreter interprets under circumstances where the communication is privileged by law.

(2) A qualified and/or intermediary interpreter shall not, without the written consent of the parties to the communication, be examined as to any information the interpreter obtains while interpreting pertaining to any proceeding then pending.

2.42.170. Fee. A qualified and/or intermediary interpreter appointed under this chapter is entitled to a reasonable fee for services, including waiting time and reimbursement for actual necessary travel expenses. The fee for services for interpreters for hearing impaired persons shall be in accordance with standards established by the department of social and health services, office of deaf services.

2.42.180. Visual recording of testimony. At the request of any party to the proceeding or on the appointing authority's initiative, the appointing authority may order that the testimony of the hearing impaired person and the interpretation of the proceeding by the qualified interpreter be visually recorded for use in verification of the official transcript of the proceeding.

In any judicial proceeding involving a capital offense, the appointing authority shall order that the testimony of the hearing impaired person and the interpretation of the proceeding by the

qualified interpreter be visually recorded for use in verification of the official transcript of the proceeding.

**CHAPTER 2.43. INTERPRETERS FOR
NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING PERSONS (2007)**

§ 2.43.010. Legislative intent It is hereby declared to be the policy of this state to secure the rights, constitutional or otherwise, of persons who, because of a non-English-speaking cultural background, are unable to readily understand or communicate in the English language, and who consequently cannot be fully protected in legal proceedings unless qualified interpreters are available to assist them.

It is the intent of the legislature in the passage of this chapter to provide for the use and procedure for the appointment of such interpreters. Nothing in chapter 358, Laws of 1989 abridges the parties' rights or obligations under other statutes or court rules or other law.

§ 2.43.020. Definitions As used in this chapter:

- (1) "Non-English-speaking person" means any person involved in a legal proceeding who cannot readily speak or understand the English language, but does not include hearing-impaired persons who are covered under chapter 2.42 RCW.
- (2) "Qualified interpreter" means a person who is able readily to interpret or translate spoken and written English for non-English-speaking persons and to interpret or translate oral or written statements of non-English-speaking persons into spoken English.
- (3) "Legal proceeding" means a proceeding in any court in this state, grand jury hearing, or hearing before an inquiry judge, or before an administrative board, commission, agency, or licensing body of the state or any political subdivision thereof.
- (4) "Certified interpreter" means an interpreter who is certified by the administrative office of the courts.
- (5) "Appointing authority" means the presiding officer or similar official of any court, department, board, commission, agency, licensing authority, or legislative body of the state or of any political subdivision thereof.

§ 2.43.030. Appointment of interpreter (1) Whenever an interpreter is appointed to assist a non-English-speaking person in a legal proceeding, the appointing authority shall, in the absence of a written waiver by the person, appoint a certified or a qualified interpreter to assist the person throughout the proceedings.

- (a) Except as otherwise provided for in (b) of this subsection, the interpreter appointed shall be a qualified interpreter.
- (b) Beginning on July 1, 1990, when a non-English-speaking person is a party to a legal proceeding, or is subpoenaed or summoned by an appointing authority or is otherwise compelled by an appointing authority to appear at a legal proceeding, the appointing authority shall use the services of only those language interpreters who have been certified by the administrative office of the courts, unless good cause is found and noted on the record by the appointing authority. For purposes of chapter 358, Laws of 1989, "good cause" includes but is not limited to a determination that:

- (i) Given the totality of the circumstances, including the nature of the proceeding and the potential penalty or consequences involved, the services of a certified interpreter are not reasonably available to the appointing authority; or
- (ii) The current list of certified interpreters maintained by the administrative office of the courts does not include an interpreter certified in the language spoken by the non-English-speaking person.
- (c) Except as otherwise provided in this section, when a non-English-speaking person is involved in a legal proceeding, the appointing authority shall appoint a qualified interpreter.
- (2) If good cause is found for using an interpreter who is not certified or if a qualified interpreter is appointed, the appointing authority shall make a preliminary determination, on the basis of testimony or stated needs of the non-English-speaking person, that the proposed interpreter is able to interpret accurately all communications to and from such person in that particular proceeding. The appointing authority shall satisfy itself on the record that the proposed interpreter:
 - (a) Is capable of communicating effectively with the court or agency and the person for whom the interpreter would interpret; and
 - (b) Has read, understands, and will abide by the code of ethics for language interpreters established by court rules.

§ 2.43.040. Fees and expenses -- Cost of providing interpreter (1) Interpreters appointed according to this chapter are entitled to a reasonable fee for their services and shall be reimbursed for actual expenses which are reasonable as provided in this section.

(2) In all legal proceedings in which the non-English-speaking person is a party, or is subpoenaed or summoned by the appointing authority or is otherwise compelled by the appointing authority to appear, including criminal proceedings, grand jury proceedings, coroner's inquests, mental health commitment proceedings, and other legal proceedings initiated by agencies of government, the cost of providing the interpreter shall be borne by the governmental body initiating the legal proceedings.

(3) In other legal proceedings, the cost of providing the interpreter shall be borne by the non-English-speaking person unless such person is indigent according to adopted standards of the body. In such a case the cost shall be an administrative cost of the governmental body under the authority of which the legal proceeding is conducted.

(4) The cost of providing the interpreter is a taxable cost of any proceeding in which costs ordinarily are taxed.

§ 2.43.050. Oath Before beginning to interpret, every interpreter appointed under this chapter shall take an oath affirming that the interpreter will make a true interpretation to the person being examined of all the proceedings in a language which the person understands, and that the interpreter will repeat the statements of the person being examined to the court or agency conducting the proceedings, in the English language, to the best of the interpreter's skill and

judgment.

§ 2.43.060. Waiver of right to interpreter (1) The right to a qualified interpreter may not be waived except when:

- (a) A non-English-speaking person requests a waiver; and
 - (b) The appointing authority determines on the record that the waiver has been made knowingly, voluntarily, and intelligently.
- (2) Waiver of a qualified interpreter may be set aside and an interpreter appointed, in the discretion of the appointing authority, at any time during the proceedings.

§ 2.43.070. Testing, certification of interpreters (1) Subject to the availability of funds, the administrative office of the courts shall establish and administer a comprehensive testing and certification program for language interpreters.

(2) The administrative office of the courts shall work cooperatively with community colleges and other private or public educational institutions, and with other public or private organizations to establish a certification preparation curriculum and suitable training programs to ensure the availability of certified interpreters. Training programs shall be made readily available in both eastern and western Washington locations.

(3) The administrative office of the courts shall establish and adopt standards of proficiency, written and oral, in English and the language to be interpreted.

(4) The administrative office of the courts shall conduct periodic examinations to ensure the availability of certified interpreters. Periodic examinations shall be made readily available in both eastern and western Washington locations.

(5) The administrative office of the courts shall compile, maintain, and disseminate a current list of interpreters certified by the office.

(6) The administrative office of the courts may charge reasonable fees for testing, training, and certification.

§ 2.43.080. Code of ethics All language interpreters serving in a legal proceeding, whether or not certified or qualified, shall abide by a code of ethics established by supreme court rule.

Court Rules

GR Rule 11. Court Interpreters

The use of qualified interpreters is authorized in judicial proceedings involving hearing impaired or non-English speaking individuals.

GR Rule 11.1. Purpose and Scope of Interpreter Commission

(a) Purpose and Scope. This rule establishes the Interpreter Commission ("Commission") and prescribes the conditions of its activities. This rule does not modify or duplicate the statutory process directing the Court Certified Interpreter Program as it is administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) (RCW 2.43). The Interpreter Commission will develop policies for the Interpreter Program and the Program Policy Manual, published on the Washington Court's website at www.courts.wa.gov, which shall constitute the official version of policies governing the Court Certified Interpreter Program.

(b) Jurisdiction and Powers. All certified court interpreters who are certified in the state of Washington by AOC are subject to rules and regulations specified in the Interpreter Program Manual. The Commission shall establish three committees to fulfill ongoing functions related to issues, discipline, and judicial/court administration education. Each committee shall consist of three Commission members and one member shall be identified as the chair.

(1) **The Issues Committee** is assigned issues, complaints, and/or requests from interpreters for review and response. If the situation cannot be resolved at the Issues Committee level, the matter will be submitted by written referral to the Disciplinary Committee.

(2) **The Disciplinary Committee** has the authority to decertify and deny certification of interpreters based on the disciplinary procedures for: (a) violations of continuing education/court hour requirements, (b) failure to comply with Interpreter Code of Conduct (GR 11.2) or professional standards, or (3) violations of law that may interfere with their duties as a certified court interpreter. The Disciplinary Committee will decide on appeal any issues submitted by the Issues Committee.

(3) **The Judicial and Court Administration Education Committee** shall provide ongoing opportunities for training and resources to judicial officers and court administrators related to court interpretation improvement.

(c) Establishment. The Supreme Court shall appoint members to the Interpreter Commission. The Supreme Court shall designate the chair of the Commission. The Commission shall include representatives from the following areas of expertise: judicial officers from the appellate and each trial court level (3), interpreter (2), court administrator (1), attorney (1), public member (2), representative from ethnic organization (1), and AOC representative (1). The term for a member of the Commission shall be three years. Members are eligible to serve a subsequent 3 year term. The Commission shall consist of eleven members. Members shall only serve on one committee and committees may be supplemented by ad hoc professionals as designated by the chair. Ad hoc members may not serve as the chair of a committee.

(d) Regulations. Policies outlining rules and regulations directing the interpreter program are specified in the Interpreter Program Manual. The Commission, through the Issues Committee and Disciplinary Committee, shall enforce the policies of the interpreter program. Interpreter program policies may be modified at any time by the Commission and AOC.

(e) Existing Law Unchanged. This rule shall not expand, narrow, or otherwise affect existing law, including but not limited to RCW chapter 2.43.

(f) Meetings. The Commission shall hold meetings as determined necessary by the chair. Meetings of the Commission are open to the public except for executive sessions and disciplinary meetings related to action against a certified interpreter.

(g) Immunity from Liability. No cause of action against the Commission, its standing members or ad hoc members appointed by the Commission, shall accrue in favor of a certified court interpreter or any other person arising from any act taken pursuant to this rule, provided that the Commission members or ad hoc members acted in good faith. The burden of proving that the acts were not taken in good faith shall be on the party asserting it.

HISTORY: Adopted effective September 1, 2005.

GR Rule 11.2. Code of Conduct for Court Interpreters
With State Court Interpreter Task Force Comments (1986)

Preamble. All language interpreters serving in a legal proceeding, whether certified or uncertified, shall abide by the following Code of Conduct:

(a) A language interpreter, like an officer of the court, shall maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct that promote public confidence in the administration of justice.

Comment – Court Interpreter Task Force (1986)

The Code of Judicial Conduct (CJC) Canons 1 and 3(B)(2) require high standards of conduct by judges and their staff and court officials. As officers of the court, such standards apply to interpreters as well. Interpreters are the vital link in communications between litigants and the court. Conflicts of interest may consciously or subconsciously affect the quality or substance of an interpretation or translation. The need for unquestioned integrity among interpreters is obvious. These canons apply to interpreters and translators for both the hearing-impaired and for individuals who speak a language other than English.

CJC 3(B)(2) requires court personnel and others subject to the judge's direction and control to observe the standards of fidelity and diligence that apply to the judge.

(b) A language interpreter shall interpret or translate the material thoroughly and precisely, adding or omitting nothing, and stating as nearly as possible what has been stated in the language of the speaker, giving consideration to variations in grammar and syntax for both languages involved. A language interpreter shall use the level of communication that best conveys the meaning of the source, and shall not interject the interpreter's personal moods or attitudes.

Comment – Court Interpreter Task Force (1986)

The interpreter should utilize the same level of language used by the speaker. This means that the interpreter will interpret colloquial, slang, obscene or crude language as well as sophisticated and erudite language, in accordance with the exact usage of the speaker. It is not the interpreter's task to tone down, improve or edit phrases.

Unless the interpreter is faithful to this concept of accurate interpretation, he or she may act as a filter or buffer in the communication process. This could damage the integrity of the trial process which is based on an adversarial system with vigorous examination and cross-examination. Consequently, the substance of questions posed and answers given during the testimony should not be altered more than absolutely necessary to assure comprehension.

The interpreter should not assume that it is his or her duty to simplify statements for a witness or defendant whom the interpreter believes cannot understand the speaker's statements. Like witnesses who do not use an interpreter, interpreted witnesses can and should request counsel or the court to explain or simplify matters if necessary.

An interpreter should never characterize or give a gratuitous explanation of testimony. The court or attorneys will request clarification from the speaker if necessary. The court and counsel should be sensitive to possible confusion by the witness. During testimony, the interpreter may volunteer to the court his or her belief that the witness does not understand a particular question or comment.

Idioms, proverbs and sayings rarely can be interpreted literally. The interpreter should seek an equivalent idiom or relate the meaning of the original idiom or saying.

While interpreting a non-English spoken language, the interpreter should not offer an explanation or repeat a witness' gesture or grimace which has been seen by the trier of fact.

Interpreters for the deaf or hearing-impaired should use the method of interpreting most readily understood by the deaf or hearing-impaired witness. For example, the witness may be more articulate in American Sign Language than in Manually Coded English or finger-spelling.

(c) When a language interpreter has any reservation about ability to satisfy an assignment competently, the interpreter shall immediately convey that reservation to the parties and to the court. If the communication mode or language of the non-English speaking person cannot be readily interpreted, the interpreter shall notify the appointing authority or the court.

Comment – Court Interpreter Task Force (1986)

A court interpreter or legal translator is often faced with new technical terms, slang, regional language differences, and other problems posing difficulty in accurate interpretations or translations.

The interpreter or translator must take time, and be given appropriate time by the court, to determine an appropriate and accurate interpretation or translation of the materials. If unable to interpret or translate the material, the parties and the court must be advised so the court can take appropriate action. When necessary, another, better qualified interpreter should be substituted. Before such substitution, the court may determine whether another linguistic approach can be used for the same result in communication. For example, a different choice of words to be interpreted may solve the problem.

(d) No language interpreter shall render services in any matter in which the interpreter is a potential witness, associate, friend, or relative of a contending party, unless a specific exception is allowed by the appointing authority for good cause noted on the record. Neither shall the interpreter serve in any matter in which the interpreter has an interest, financial or otherwise, in the outcome. Nor shall any language interpreter serve in a matter where the interpreter has participated in the choice of counsel.

Comment – Court Interpreter Task Force (1986)

The purpose of this canon is to avoid any actual or potential conflict of interest. CJC Canon 3(C) requires similar disqualification of a judge because of a conflict of interest. Interpreters should maintain an impartial attitude with defendants, witnesses, attorneys and families. They should neither conceive of themselves nor permit themselves to be used as an investigator for any party to a case. They should clearly indicate their role as interpreters if they are asked by either party to participate in interviews or prospective witnesses outside of the court. Interpreters should not “take sides” or consider themselves aligned with the prosecution or the defense.

See comments to Canon 6 which discusses the use of interpreters in client and witness interviews. Care must be taken to avoid exposing an interpreter unnecessarily to the conflict of becoming a potential witness on the merits.

Both court interpreters and jurors should be apprised of the identity of each during voir dire to help determine whether any juror knows the interpreter.

The fees and remuneration of a court interpreter or legal translator shall never be contingent upon the success or failure of the cause in which she or he has been engaged.

Interpreters and translators shall not interpret in any matter in which his or her employer has an interest as an advocate, litigant or otherwise.

Interpreters shall be limited to the role of communication facilitators.

No interpreter who has served as an investigator assisting in preparation for litigation shall serve as a court interpreter in that cause.

(e) Except in the interpreter's official capacity, no language interpreter shall discuss, report, or comment upon a matter in which the person serves as interpreter. Interpreters shall not disclose any communication that is privileged by law without the written consent of the parties to the communication, or pursuant to court order.

Comment – Court Interpreter Task Force (1986)

To promote the trust and integrity of the judicial system, it is important that court officials, including interpreters and translators, refrain from commenting publicly regarding an action. Interpreters and translators shall not offer an opinion to anyone regarding the credibility of witnesses, the prospective outcome of a case, the propriety of a verdict, the conduct of a case, or any other matter not already available by public record.

(f) A language interpreter shall report immediately to the appointing authority in the proceeding any solicitation or effort by another to induce or encourage the interpreter to violate any law, any provision of the rules which may be approved by the courts for the practice of language interpreting, or any provisions of this Code of Conduct.

(g) Language interpreters shall not give legal advice and shall refrain from the unauthorized practice of law.

Comment – Court Interpreter Task Force (1986)

The interpreter shall never give legal advice of any kind to the non-English speaking person or to any other person, whether solicited or not. In all instances, the non-English speaking person should be referred to counsel. The interpreter may give general information to a non-English speaking person regarding the time, place and nature of court proceedings. However, in matters requiring legal judgment, the individual should be referred to an attorney.

The interpreter should never function as an individual referral service for any particular attorney or attorneys. This kind of activity has the appearance of impropriety. When asked to refer a non-English speaking person to a particular attorney, the interpreter should refer such individual to the local bar association or to the Office of the Public Defender.

GR Rule 11.3. Telephone Interpreting

(amended effective September 1, 2005)

(a) Interpreters may be appointed to serve by telephone for brief, nonevidentiary proceedings, including initial appearances and arraignments, when interpreters are not readily available to the court. Telephone interpretation is not authorized for evidentiary hearings.

(b) RCW 2.43 and GR 11.2 must be followed regarding the interpreter's qualifications and other matters.

(c) Electronic equipment used during the hearing must ensure that the non-English speaking party hears all statements made by the participants. If electronic equipment is not available for simultaneous interpreting, the hearing shall be conducted to allow consecutive interpretation of each sentence.

(d) Attorney-client consultations must be interpreted confidentially.

(e) Written documents which would normally be orally translated by the interpreter must be read aloud to allow full oral translation of the material by the interpreter.

(f) An audio recording shall be made of all statements made on the record during their interpretation, and the same shall be preserved.

