



Office of Court Administration

TEXAS COURT REMOTE INTERPRETER SERVICE

–POLICIES AND PROCEDURES–

1. **Program overview.** The Office of Court Administration's (OCA's) Texas Court Remote Interpreter Service (TCRIS) provides:

- *free* Spanish language interpretation services by licensed court interpreters
- in all case types
- by telephone or by videoconferencing, using the court's existing equipment
- for short, non-evidentiary hearings that are typically 30 minutes or less in length*
- by advanced scheduling or on demand, as available
- in Texas district and county-level courts and, as time and resources permit, in justice and municipal courts

**Note:* Interpretation services, however, should be scheduled in a larger block of time than 30 minutes, to account for the slower pace of interpreted hearings, possible delayed start time of the hearing, and other extenuating circumstances.

1.1 ***Contact information.***

Texas Court Remote Interpreter Service

P O Box 12066

Austin, Texas 78711-2066

Phone: (512) 463-5656

Fax: (512) 666-3633

Email: interpreter@txcourts.gov

Information is also available at: <http://www.txcourts.gov/tcris>

1.2 ***Qualifications of OCA's staff interpreters.*** Spanish language interpretation services will be provided by licensed court interpreters employed by OCA. To earn a court interpreting license in Texas, interpreters must pass stringent oral and written testing developed by the National Center for State Courts' Consortium for Language Access in the Courts. OCA interpreters are experienced in Texas courtroom procedures, meet annual continuing education requirements, and comply with the Licensed Court Interpreters Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility.

1.3 ***Free interpretation services.*** While the *interpretation services are free*, the court is responsible for the payment of any phone or other charges incurred, as well as for providing the phone or videoconferencing equipment used by the court.

- 1.4 **Mode of interpretation.** Interpretation will be *consecutive*, meaning that only one person talks at a time, usually about two sentences. (**Note:** equipment is currently on the market for *simultaneous* remote interpretation, but it is not yet used by this program due to lack of funding.)

Sight translation of documents is available by advance arrangement based upon availability of interpreters, but interpretation of audio or video recordings is not an available service.

- 1.5 **Service priorities.** TCRIS's primary goal is to improve access to licensed Spanish court interpreters in rural district and county-level courts with limited access to licensed interpreters. Therefore, first priority shall be given to rural district and county-level courts for their access to OCA's court interpreters. However, as time and resources permit, OCA's interpreters may also be available to provide interpretation services to **all** district, county-level, justice and municipal courts, regardless of county population or access to licensed interpreters.

Interpretation services are available for **all case types**. However, if the demand for interpretation services starts to exceed the capacity available, then services will be provided according to the following priority order:

- Priority 1: Protective order hearings
- Priority 2: Indigent defendants in criminal cases and respondents in juvenile cases
- Priority 3: Criminal and juvenile cases
- Priority 4: Probate and mental health cases
- Priority 5: Family law cases
- Priority 6: Civil cases
- Priority 7: Other cases

Priorities will be applied for scheduling purposes as interpretation requests are received. Once TCRIS has confirmed that interpretation services will be provided for an upcoming time period, those services will be provided to the court regardless of later requests for rural courts or higher-priority case types during the same time period.

2. **How to Schedule and Use the Remote Interpretation Services.**

- 2.1 **Enrolling for program services.** To enroll, a court must complete the enrollment form at: <https://www.appointmentquest.com/scheduler/2150096234/enroll>. A court lacking Internet access can call OCA, at (512) 463-5656, to request that OCA fax an enrollment form to it. After the court enrolls, OCA will send instructions on how to schedule interpretation services. The instructions will be sent by e-mail (or fax if the court does not have Internet access).
- 2.2 **Hours of service.** Interpretation services are available Monday through Friday (except on state holidays), from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The court can log into AppointmentQuest, at <http://www.appointmentquest.com/provider/2150096234/login> to check the availability of an interpreter on a particular day(s) and time(s).

Courts without Internet access can obtain information about availability of services on a particular day(s) and time(s) by calling TCRIS, at (512) 463-5656, or faxing a request for that information to (512) 666-3633.

- 2.3 Scheduling services.** Interpretation services are usually only available for short, non-evidentiary hearings that are typically 30 minutes or less in length.

When the court has set or is planning to set a hearing date for which interpretation services are needed, the judge or court staff can access the Interpreter Calendar, which is posted online at www.appointmentquest.com/provider/2150096234/login, to determine interpreter availability and schedule services. The court will select an available time and date and enter the required prehearing information directly into the AppointmentQuest calendar. The calendar will automatically send a message to the court acknowledging the request, and a staff interpreter will confirm the session by the next business day.

If two or more interpreted hearings are planned back to back, the court must set up a **separate** appointment for each, scheduling an appointment(s) in the adjoining time slot(s) for the anticipated length of time for each subsequent hearing. However, the total maximum amount of continuous time that can be scheduled for **all** hearings is two hours.

Courts without Internet access can call TCRIS at (512) 463-5656 to determine interpreter availability and request a prehearing information form. The court must fax a request for interpreter services, along with the required prehearing information, to (512) 666-3633. A staff interpreter will confirm the appointment by fax or phone call.

- 2.4 Appointment length.** Since all speakers present at the hearing must pause while the interpreter speaks in order to allow the limited English participant(s) to hear the interpreter, the court should expect hearings interpreted remotely to take about twice as long as hearings with an on-site interpreter. For example, if a hearing with no interpreter (or an on-site interpreter) is scheduled for 10 minutes on the docket, approximately 20 minutes should be scheduled for the same hearing when a remote interpreter is used.

If a court has more than one hearing requiring an interpreter, the court may schedule the hearings back to back. However, the total maximum amount of continuous time that can be scheduled for **all** hearings is two hours.

In order to avoid running out of time and losing an interpreter who must sign off to fulfill another scheduled court interpretation, the court should schedule extra time as a buffer when the court is unsure if its hearing will start and end on time.

The interpreter code of ethics requires OCA staff interpreters to inform the judge when mental fatigue renders them incapable of continuing to interpret at a high level of accuracy. Research indicates that between 30 minutes and one hour of uninterrupted

interpretation is reasonable between breaks, but the individual interpreter will use discretion to decide in each case.

During the course of an interpretation session, if the court requests an interpreter to continue interpreting past the two-hour point, and there is no conflict with a subsequent appointment, the interpreter shall have sole discretion in deciding whether to: 1) accept the request and continue interpreting, if the session has included enough pauses that the interpreter feels sufficiently alert and focused to continue interpreting competently at a high level of accuracy; 2) offer to transfer the interpretation duties to another licensed OCA court interpreter, if available; or 3) request a sufficient amount of time for recess for mental rest and recovery, if no other interpreter is available.

2.5 *Cancellation policy.* TCRIS must be notified of any changes in or cancellations of scheduled interpreter services as soon as possible. Prompt notification allows other courts the opportunity to schedule interpreter services during any changed or cancelled period. Cancellations or changes are preferred through AppointmentQuest, but can also be made by e-mail or phone if necessary.

2.6 *Required speakerphone or videoconferencing equipment.* To access TCRIS services, the following equipment is required:

- (1) a speakerphone in the courtroom or judge's chambers and the ability to initiate a long-distance telephone call;¹ or
- (2) videoconferencing equipment compatible with OCA's system.

Videoconferencing is the preferred method for providing remote-site interpretation services, as non-verbal cues are important for rendering an accurate interpretation.

OCA interpreters will have: a) a two-line speakerphone and wireless headset for telephonic interpretation; and b) a computer, webcam and USB headset for videoconference interpretation.

2.7 *Testing court's phone or videoconferencing equipment.* Regardless of the type of telecommunication equipment used, the court's equipment must meet minimum quality standards. When a new court enrolls in the program, an OCA staff interpreter will arrange and conduct a quality test call to that court before the first interpretation services are provided. This quality test call will determine whether the court's phone or videoconferencing equipment will support the use of an OCA court interpreter.

3. Data collection and reporting.

¹ The speakerphone must be "full duplex," meaning both parties can speak at the same time and still hear each other simultaneously. Since the late 1990's, all but the least expensive speakerphones have the full-duplex feature. Full duplex speakers also have an echo-elimination feature. With older, half-duplex phones, the speaker cannot hear the other party until he/she stops speaking, and the first few words of the sentence may be cut off.

3.1 Required data. OCA will collect and maintain data that measure the use and effectiveness of the program; therefore, the court must provide certain basic information on each case both before and after the interpretation services are provided.

3.1.1 Prehearing Information. The prehearing information the court provides to OCA will assist the interpreter in preparing for the hearing, as well as provide information on the overall use of the program (e.g., the number of times interpreters were provided for defendants in criminal hearings, witnesses in civil hearings, etc.). This prehearing information includes, but is not limited to:

- style and number of cause;
- type of case;
- type of hearing;
- name of the limited English proficient (LEP) participant;
- role of the LEP participant in the case (e.g., defendant, plaintiff, witness, etc.); and
- court's telecommunications equipment (videoconference or telephone).

In addition, the court should provide OCA with any other information that would be helpful in providing the interpretation services (e.g., recent changes in the telecommunications equipment used in the courtroom, a new judge who has not used the system before, an LEP person who is a child, etc.).

3.1.2 Post-hearing data. Semiannually, a short survey will be sent to each court using TCRIS during the prior six-month period. The survey will solicit feedback on the effectiveness of the interpretation services and how they can be improved. The survey will be sent by e-mail (or fax for courts without e-mail).

3.2 Non-compliance. If a court fails to provide any requested data to TCRIS, that court may become ineligible to participate further in TCRIS until the requested data is provided.