

Guidelines for Contract Court Interpreters

Accepting an Assignment:

An interpreter who accepts an assignment is expected to remain for the entire duration of that assignment. Therefore, **before accepting an assignment**, please notify the office of any obligation that may conflict with your ability to stay for the entire proceeding.

Dress Code:

Interpreters should dress in a manner that reflects the dignity of the court. This means formal business attire. Casual clothing is not appropriate, nor is casual footwear, such as sneakers, unless you have a medical reason.

Arriving on Time:

Interpreters should be in the courtroom or other assigned location, ready to interpret, at least a few minutes before the scheduled start time. This will allow you to check in with the courtroom deputy, introduce yourself to the parties, and set up. While others may be late to a hearing, an interpreter never should be. Traffic congestion and strict courthouse security measures are daily realities. Please keep these things in mind and plan accordingly in order to comply with the above. However, in the event that you should become delayed due to some unforeseeable event, please call the office at 973-645-4621 with your estimated time of arrival.

Inclement Weather:

In the event of inclement weather, please call the appropriate toll free number for court closings:

Camden: 866-726-0726

Newark: 866-208-1405

Trenton: 866-848-6059

Reporting Impediments to Performance:

Although an interpreter should strive to be as unobtrusive as possible, impediments to proper performance may arise in the courtroom. Examples of impediments include a party who speaks or reads too softly or at a rate of speed that is hard to follow. If such impediments occur, you should bring them to the attention of the judge, who has the final say in all courtroom matters. By way of example, in the case of a soft-spoken party, it is helpful to rise and say, "Your Honor, the interpreter is having a hard time hearing", and in the case of a party who speaks or reads too quickly, "Your Honor, the interpreter is having a hard time keeping up."

Refraining from Comment:

Interpreters should bear in mind that their role is to interpret impartially for the court. Thus, they should refrain from expressing an opinion about a case or the outcome thereof and should never provide guidance or advice to any party involved in a matter, even if the party requests it. Similarly an interpreter should not comment on translated or transcribed evidence or on the accuracy of any other interpreter, unless asked to do so by the judge. Doing anything else may create the appearance of bias and impropriety, which should be avoided.

Team Interpreting:

When two interpreters are assigned to work as part of a team, both are expected to remain in the courtroom throughout the duration of the proceeding and to take turns interpreting. This means that while the active interpreter interprets, the passive interpreter assists the active interpreter, who may need help with a word or phrase, or with confirmation of something that may not have been heard clearly. The passive interpreter may also need to assist defense counsel with attorney/client consultations. It is not appropriate to leave the courtroom for more than a few minutes, except during breaks announced by the court (or when one of the interpreters is needed in another courtroom temporarily), because your fellow interpreter or counsel may need your help.

Team Interpreting from the Witness Stand:

In order to help preserve the clarity of the record, interpreters should use the consecutive mode of interpreting when interpreting for witnesses from the witness stand. To avoid fatigue, interpreters should rotate. As a general guideline, interpreters should switch during natural breaks in the questioning -- for instance, between direct and cross examination. However, this may vary depending on the length and complexity of the questions and responses.

When interpreting for the defendant from the witness stand, it is suggested that the passive interpreter stand or sit in close proximity to the active interpreter (usually behind the active interpreter). This will allow the passive interpreter to hear the defendant, the interpretations rendered, and promptly come to the assistance of the active interpreter if there has been a material error or omission in the interpretation. Furthermore, if there has been an error or omission in the interpretation, the active interpreter should correct the record immediately.

In multiple defendant matters or for witnesses other than the defendant, the passive interpreter should be positioned in such a way that he/she can readily assist the active interpreter and defense counsel with attorney/client consultations.