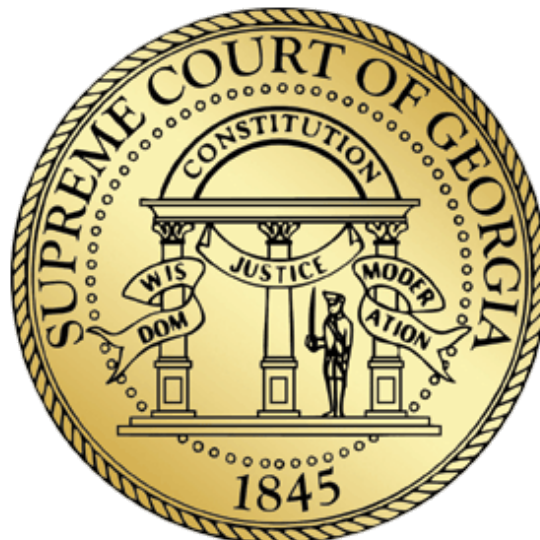


Supreme Court of Georgia Commission on Interpreters Creates New Model Protocol Addressing Language Barriers in Georgia Courts

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Atlanta, GA – Thanks to a \$15,000 technical assistance grant awarded by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the State Justice Institute (SJI) in 2015, the Supreme Court of Georgia Commission on Interpreters developed a “Model Administrative Protocol” or MAP, the first of its kind in Georgia and widely believed to be the first of its kind in any non-unified court system in the nation. Justice Keith Blackwell, who serves as
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Chair to the Commission on Interpreters, said, “This newly developed model protocol was developed to ensure persons who are limited English proficient (LEP) or Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) have unhindered access to justice.”

The Commission’s MAP is part of a larger national initiative supported by NCSC and SJI to help state courts meet their obligation of providing interpreters and other language assistance services. The Judicial Council of the State of Georgia endorsed the MAP unanimously as a model guide for all Georgia courts. The MAP has been distributed statewide and published on the Commission’s website (<https://georgiacourts.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Supreme-Court-of-Georgia-Commission-on-Interpreters-Model-Administrative-Protocol-Final-Version.pdf>). “Georgia courts have been and continue to be committed to improving access, promoting equity, and preserving justice,” said Jana J. Edmondson-Cooper, an attorney and member of the Commission, who initiated and led the development of the MAP. “The MAP has been made available to our courts at a critical time, as Georgia courts – like their counterparts across the nation –, work diligently to continue serving Georgians during a global pandemic,” said Edmondson-Cooper.

The NCSC issued guidance (<https://ncsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/ctadmin/id/2347>) recently regarding remote court operations and access to justice considerations during COVID 19. Regarding LEP litigants and litigants with disabilities, the NCSC noted, “people with disabilities, with limited English proficiency, or with limited access to technology are still entitled to the use of the court system, even in a time of crisis. Planning should center them because decisions made that allow their continued use of the court will also necessarily result in conditions that improve the experience for all court patrons.” Edmondson-Cooper said, “the MAP does exactly that – it is an available resource tool Georgia courts may utilize to assess and address access to justice challenges as courts continue remote operations and make plans to re-open once it is safe.” The MAP, which is easily adaptable, may be useful to other non-unified court systems in the country as they address their own access to justice challenges involving LEP and DHH court participants.

In the coming months, Commission members and staff will provide training to stakeholders on how adopting the MAP can help bridge communication barriers and create sustainable language access plans. The Commission extends special gratitude to the Cobb Judicial Circuit for being long-time access to justice leader and serving as the first circuit to adopt the MAP during its pilot phase in 2018.

Georgia Judicial Council of Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts

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