



National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers

FACT SHEET

Working with Sign Language Interpreters in Juvenile Matters Involving Deaf Participants

Juvenile proceedings involving deaf youths pose separate challenges for courts. Deaf juveniles often present unique linguistic patterns that necessitate a special type of interpreter, called a Deaf Interpreter, to work with the court interpreter to ensure the juvenile is able to fully participate in the proceeding. The term Deaf Interpreter is used to refer to an individual who is deaf and possesses a unique mastery of ASL and use of visual-gestural language features that enables her to work effectively in settings where communication issues are complex and/or high risk. (See Fact Sheet, Deaf Interpreters as Reasonable Accommodation). Most of the work of Deaf Interpreters is done in collaboration with sign language interpreters who can hear. When a Deaf Interpreter is needed, the court interpreters should meet beforehand with the court and counsel to discuss logistical and procedural issues to ensure that placement and pacing is effective for communication purposes.

There also may be times when the young person involved is not deaf, but has deaf parents who are afforded a statutory right to be present and participate in the adjudication. In this case, the interpreters function as court interpreters and should be sworn and placed in the well of the courtroom even though the parents are often in the audience. This positioning preserves the role of the interpreter as the proceedings interpreter versus the personal interpreter of the parents. However, in order for the parents to be able to see the interpreters, identifying an appropriate and stationary location for the interpreters is important and can be determined by the court in cooperation with the parents.

Should you have more questions, further information is available from the NCIEC at www.nciec.org, on the Consortium's Work on Legal Interpreting subpage under the Legal Specialization link.

The contents of this Fact Sheet were developed under grant funds from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

The National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers is funded from 2010 – 2015 by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services CFDA #84.160A and B, Training of Interpreters for Individuals Who Are Deaf and Individuals Who Are Deaf-Blind. Permission is granted to copy the materials enclosed herein, provided that National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers is credited as the source and referenced appropriately on any such copies.