

HARRIS COUNTY
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP) PLAN FOR COURT PROCEEDINGS

- 1.0. Legal Basis and Purpose:** The purpose of Harris County’s Limited English Proficiency Plan (“LEP Plan”) is to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000d, *et seq.*) and to provide a framework for the provision of timely and reasonable language assistance to litigants and witnesses who come before court system in Harris County, Texas.
- 2.0. A Court Determines the Need for an Interpreter.** Many people who come before a court may need an interpreter, but will not request one. Often, these individuals do not realize interpreters are available or do not recognize the level of English proficiency necessary to understand court proceedings. Upon a court’s request, the County may be able to provide some assistance for non-mandated proceedings within existing funding restrictions and will take reasonable steps to do so. Courts may determine an LEP court customer needs an interpreter for a court hearing as follows:
- 2.1. Prior to a court proceeding, an LEP individual, or anyone acting with permission on behalf of the LEP person, may notify a court of the need for a court interpreter.
 - 2.2. The need for an interpreter also may be made known in the courtroom at the time of the proceeding. To the extent possible, advance notice of the need for an interpreter should be given to the court and all parties.
 - 2.3. A court may *sua sponte* determine that it is appropriate to provide an interpreter for a court matter.
 - 2.4. A court will make all reasonable efforts to locate an interpreter as outlined in this plan. However, in a case where the court is mandated to provide an interpreter, but one is not available at the time of the proceeding, the case may be postponed and continued on a date when an interpreter can be provided.
 - 2.5. For uncontested matters in which the court is not mandated to provide an interpreter, the party is responsible for obtaining and paying the cost of an interpreter. In those instances, the judge officiating may permit use of an unlicensed interpreter; otherwise the term ‘interpreter’ as used herein means an interpreter licensed pursuant to State law.

- 3.0. Courts' Policies and Procedures.** Courts may establish and post policies and procedures for requesting an interpreter on the courts' websites.
- 4.0. Costs for Spoken Language Interpreters in the Courtroom.**
- 4.1.** The County will provide interpreters at no cost to assist litigants and witnesses in the following matters: criminal cases, juvenile hearings and trials, contempt proceedings, and proceedings involving termination of parental rights
- 4.2.** Within the existing court budget, the County will take reasonable steps to provide interpreters at no cost to assist indigent litigants and witnesses in the following matters: hearings involving domestic violence, elder abuse, family law, and child support cases.
- 5.0. Translated Forms and Documents.**
- 5.1.** To the extent funding is available, forms and instructional materials will be translated into commonly used languages and available to the public through the office of the Harris County District Clerk.
- 5.2.** Interpreters provided at County expense for court hearings are expected to provide sight translations of court documents and correspondence associated with the case.
- 7.0. County Staff and Volunteer Accommodations.**
- 7.1. Bilingual Staff .** The County is an equal opportunity employer and often hires bilingual staff.
- 7.2. Volunteers.** The County will make facility space available to the Harris County Bar Association and Houston Volunteer Lawyers for providing bilingual volunteers to assist LEP individuals in family law self-help centers.
- 8.0. Staff Training.** The County is committed to providing LEP training opportunities for all staff, as well as county and judicial officers. This LEP training would include, but not be limited to: diversity training; cultural competency training; LEP plan training; new employee orientation training; and orientation on the use of court interpreters and language competency.
- 9.0. Plan Approval and Public Notification.**
- 9.1.** The County's LEP plan is subject to approval by a majority of the Harris County

Commissioners Court. Any revisions of the plan will be submitted to the Harris County Commissioners Court for approval.

9.2. Copies of Harris County's Limited English Proficiency plan will be posted on the County's public website. Hard copies of the plan will be made available on request.

10.0. Evaluation and review of the LEP Plan. The County will periodically assess whether changes to the LEP plan are needed. The plan shall remain in effect unless modified or updated.

11.0 LEP Plan Effective date:

March 13, 2012