

People who appear in a court in the State of New York have the basic right to an interpreter.

Criminal defendants must be allowed to assist in their own defense by being present at their trial

and being able to understand the court proceedings. The courts have ruled that criminal

defendants who cannot understand English are entitled to have the proceedings interpreted for

them in a language that they do understand. Failure to provide an interpreter where one is

needed may void the outcome in a criminal trial. Similarly, in a civil trial, where a witness or

party does not speak English, the court has the authority to appoint an interpreter. In fact, the

Judiciary Law provides for the temporary appointment of an interpreter in any court, if these

services are necessary. This right also applies in instances involving physical disability such as

a hearing impairment.