

**Department of Justice**  
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**Justice Department Issues Guidance Letter to State Courts Regarding  
Their Obligation to Provide Language Access**

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department today issued a letter to chief justices and administrators of state courts clarifying the obligation of courts that receive federal financial assistance to provide oral interpretation, written translation and other language services to people who are limited English proficient (LEP). This month marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of [Executive Order 13166](#) which requires federal agencies to ensure that recipients of federal financial assistance comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by providing meaningful access to LEP persons.

Today's letter provides state courts guidance regarding the requirement to provide meaningful access to their programs and services for LEP persons through the provision of language services, pursuant to the prohibition against national origin discrimination contained in Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (Safe Streets Act), and their implementing regulations. The letter includes an overview of applicable civil rights laws, Supreme Court precedent, guidance and illustrative examples of situations that would warrant the provision of language services.

The letter explains that applicable civil rights laws require courts receiving federal financial assistance to provide meaningful access to all civil, criminal or administrative hearings, at no charge to LEP individuals. It further explains that such access should be extended to LEP parties and other LEP individuals whose presence or participation is appropriate to the court proceedings; should be provided in court programs or activities outside of the courtroom; and should include language services for communication between LEP individuals and court appointed or court managed service providers.

“Justice requires that all individuals have meaningful access to the critical services provided by the nation's state court systems, regardless of the individual's English language skills,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “As we mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the issuance of Executive Order 13166 this month, it is especially appropriate to remember our shared responsibility to reduce persistent language barriers in court proceedings and services that are of such importance to the daily lives of parties, victims, witnesses and the public.”

For more information about Title VI and the Safe Streets Act, or to obtain copies of the letter, visit [www.lep.gov](http://www.lep.gov).