



Administrative Office of the Courts

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State courts face increasing requests for interpreting services

SANTA FE – New Mexico’s Judiciary is expanding its network of interpreters to help address a growing need for language access services for jurors and people in court cases who have a limited proficiency in English or are deaf or hard of hearing.

Interpreting services were provided in 87 languages in New Mexico courts in the 2025 fiscal year. People requested about 50,300 hours of interpreting in FY25 — more than double from the 2021 fiscal year. The five most frequently requested languages were Spanish, American Sign Language (ASL), Navajo, Arabic and Vietnamese.

Four newly certified court interpreters and four Justice System Interpreters (JSI) were recently added to the roster of people available to provide interpreting services in New Mexico courts. With these additions, the Language Access Services (LAS) program in the Administrative Office of the Courts has brought on six fully certified interpreters and a dozen JSIs over the past two years to expand coverage across New Mexico.

“We continue to work to recruit more interpreters, and our training initiatives and other changes are producing solid results — strengthening interpreter readiness and improving statewide access to qualified language professionals,” said Freda Valdez, the LAS statewide program manager. The program coordinates and funds court interpreter and translation services.

Interpreting occurs in-person in courts and remotely. About 20 fully certified Spanish interpreters and a dozen JSIs work with the state court system, although some only provide interpreting remotely. Most of the interpreters are contractors and there are 13 staff interpreters in the Judiciary, including nine members of the LAS team. Fully certified interpreters may interpret for any court proceeding, including for jurors. JSIs can interpret for most court hearings but not for jurors.

To achieve full certification, a person must pass a multiple-stage nationally developed examination — first a written test and then an oral exam, which is difficult because it mirrors the speed, complexity and pressure of real courtroom proceedings. JSIs must complete a 24-week LAS program and earn high scores on an oral exam.

Alma Luna of Albuquerque and Luis Cespedes of Raton are among those who earned full certification as court interpreters in the past several months.

“The Spanish interpreter certification process is intense. I started my studies in 2021, and now I work at the Second Judicial District Court where I interpret in multiple settings every day,” said Luna. “I am very proud to have achieved this milestone.”

Cespedes works as a freelance contract interpreter with the Judiciary. “Interpreting is an endless learning experience. This is very exciting for me,” said Cespedes. “My goal remains simple: to facilitate seamless communication while upholding the highest standards of accuracy, professionalism, and integrity of process.”

LAS has recruited interpreter candidates through presentations at high schools and universities in New Mexico. LAS is collaborating with the University of Texas at El Paso to integrate part of the LAS certification training into the school’s curriculum. LAS also has updated its course of study and implemented structured mentoring of interpreter candidates.

“Interpreters play an essential role in ensuring equal access to justice for individuals who speak little or no English and for the deaf or hard-of-hearing,” said Chief Justice David K. Thomson.

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Alma Luna
Certified Court Interpreter



Luis Cespedes
Certified Court Interpreter



Freda Valdez
Language Access Services
Statewide Program Manager



David K. Thomson
Chief Justice
New Mexico Supreme Court