

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

OFFICE OF COURT INTERPRETERS

Question: What does an interpreter do?

Answer: An interpreter is a trained, experienced, and impartial professional. They interpret everything that is said during court proceedings completely and accurately, making every effort to retain the register and tone of the utterance as well as the content.

For example, if a person says, in Spanish, “I want to speak to a lawyer,” the interpreter will interpret exactly in English, “I want to speak to a lawyer.” That is, the interpreter will interpret the statement exactly as it was said and will never say, “He says he wants to speak to a lawyer.”

Question: Whom does the Office of Court Interpreters (OCI) serve?

Answer: The OCI serves the court and the members of the public who do not speak English or speak English as a second language, including litigants, witnesses, parents of juveniles, and other parties who may appear before the court.

Question: How can I reach a court interpreter?

Answer: Currently, the OCI has only Spanish interpreters. You can contact the OCI by phone at (401) 222-8710 or via email at interpreterfeedback@courts.ri.gov **before** your scheduled court date.

If you are already in the courthouse and need a Spanish interpreter, speak to someone on the court staff, a clerk, or a sheriff before your case begins. The clerk will call an interpreter. There are Spanish interpreters daily at the Garrahy and Licht Judicial Complexes as well as the Kent County Courthouse.

If you speak a language other than Spanish, you or your attorney can contact the OCI to make arrangements for an interpreter **before** your scheduled court date. If you are already in the courthouse and need an interpreter in a language other than Spanish, the OCI will make the necessary arrangements to provide you with an interpreter for that day, if possible, or for your next court date. If you do not have an attorney, please use the Language Identification Flashcard to identify the language you speak to the OCI. The Language Identification Flashcard is available at the Clerk’s Offices for our courts, at information booths in some of our courthouses, and online on our website.

Question: Are the services of the interpreter free?

Answer: Yes. When an interpreter is requested, that service is provided at no cost to the court user.

Question: What languages can the OCI interpret?

Answer: Currently interpretation is available in Spanish. The office interprets for court users from any Spanish-speaking country.

Interpreters in other languages are contracted by the court on a per case basis. If you need an interpreter in a language other than Spanish please inform the court or your lawyer before your court date so that arrangements can be made.

Question: Where do they work?

Answer: Interpreters work in all of the state's courthouses. Spanish interpreters maintain a daily presence in the Garrahy and Licht Judicial Complexes as well as the Kent County Courthouse. They work at the McGrath and Murray Judicial Complexes also.

Question: Are the interpreters impartial?

Answer: Yes. Interpreters from the OCI are impartial officers of the court.

Question: Will a person's conversations with his or her lawyer still be confidential?

Answer: Yes. Interpreters obey the [Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities](#).

Question: Will OCI interpreters come to a lawyer's office?

Answer: No. The OCI work in the courthouses exclusively. However, interpreters may travel to the prisons for court-appointed attorneys and their clients.

Question: Will the interpreter explain the proceedings?

Answer: No. Interpreters do not explain, paraphrase, or give legal advice. A professional interpreter from the OCI interprets what is said and does not add or omit anything.

Question: What certification does Rhode Island require for court interpreters?

Answer: The Rhode Island Judiciary recognizes certification from three national organizations: The National Center for State Courts Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification, The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT), and the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE). The judge may also decide to use the services of a qualified interpreter if no certified interpreter is available.

Question: What is the difference between a professional interpreter and a bilingual person who interprets?

Answer: A professional court interpreter has specific training in consecutive, simultaneous, and sight translation modes of interpretation in the legal field. They are bound by the Interpreter's Oath and the [Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities](#).

A bilingual person speaks two languages, but has not received training in vocabulary, protocol, and professional standards.

Question: What is the Interpreter's Oath?

Answer: Staff members were administered the following Interpreter's Oath in December 2004:

“You do solemnly swear that you will faithfully perform your duties as interpreter, well and truly interpreting all questions asked of and answers given by the defendant to the best of your ability, so help you God?”

Question: What is the difference between a translator and an interpreter?

Answer: A translator works with written material. An interpreter works with spoken language.
