

Washington State Judicial Branch

2023-25 Biennial Budget

Develop Court Interpreter Scheduling System

Agency: Administrative Office of the Courts

Decision Package Code/Title: P4 – Develop Court Interpreter Sched Sys

Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The Administrative Office of the Courts requests \$240,000 of one-time expenditure authority to conduct requirements gathering, analysis, and an options analysis to determine the most efficient option for developing or procuring a statewide interpreter scheduling application. All trial courts in Washington State must provide interpreters for court customers to ensure equal access to justice and scheduling of court interpreters can be a barrier to providing that access. An optimal solution would provide a statewide online interpreter scheduling application that could be used by every court in Washington State. (General Fund—State)

Fiscal Summary:

	FY 2024	FY 2025	Biennial	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial
Staffing						
FTEs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001-1	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$240,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Expenditures						
	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$240,000	\$0	\$0	\$0

Package Description:

In order to ensure equitable access to the courts, courts must provide interpreters for court customers who have limited English proficiency or are deaf or hard of hearing. Scheduling court interpreters can be a complex process for the courts as interpreter scheduling is often times a manual, labor-intensive process for court staff, and the ramifications and stakes of not being able to get a court credentialed interpreter in a timely manner is an access to justice issue. Considerations for scheduling include the availability of interpreters in a given language, the location and length of the encounter, the qualifications of the interpreter, the proximity of the interpreter to the court, the amount of notice the court needs to provide for the interpreter service, and so on.

A number of courts have found solutions to the otherwise manual process of scheduling interpreters. One solution is to pay a commercial vendor who helps the court schedule interpreters. That solution adds additional costs to the court and to the interpreter to pay the vendor for the service. Another solution that courts have found is using an online interpreter scheduling service, operating as a software as service platform. This solution has proven to be a cost-effective and efficient way for courts to schedule court credentialed interpreters in a timely manner. Unfortunately, one of the most popular online interpreter scheduling services plans to discontinue this service.

Without a statewide application to rely on, courts must find their own solution, and replace that solution if a vendor changes or discontinues a service.

The Administrative Office of the Courts requests \$240,000 to conduct requirements gathering, analysis, and an options analysis to determine the most efficient option for developing or procuring a state-wide interpreter scheduling application. An optimal solution would provide a statewide online interpreter scheduling application that could be used

by every court in Washington State. At a minimum, the system would allow searches for court credentialed interpreters and schedule them based on location, language, payment terms, expected job duration, interpreter travel distance, etc. It would also provide notification, confirmation, and reminders to interpreters via email or text. Ideally, the system could also have the ability to directly connect to remote participation with the interpreter either by telephone or video.

The system would also be able to connect to the Language Access Interpreter Reimbursement Program, and have the possibility of connecting to the courts' case management systems. Connecting to the reimbursement program would provide greater efficiency for courts and Administrative Office of the Courts staff administering the program, as courts would no longer be required to report their interpreter usage data as it will already be captured by the scheduling software.

The interpreter scheduling system would provide the following capabilities:

- Greater accessibility to the courts for people who speak languages other than English or are deaf or hard of hearing. The system would enable courts quicker and easier access to the statewide interpreter database, and allow them to schedule interpreters through a one-stop shop.
- An easier, more efficient, and more effective way for courts to request court credentialed interpreters, and for interpreters to accept and calendar multiple court assignments.
- Less court staff time needed to schedule interpreters, more court staff time spent on other court matters.
- Less money wasted on interpreter cancellations because it will be easier and quicker for courts to schedule and cancel interpreters without incurring cancellation costs.
- Less court staff time needed to input court interpreting data needed for the Language Access Interpreter Reimbursement program.
- Interpreters will be able to accept assignments instantly with enough information to ascertain if they are the proper fit for a case or Limited English Proficiency party.
- The Limited English Proficiency or deaf or hard of hearing person has the potential to have consistent language services throughout a case. Currently, most courts do not have an interpreter assignment tracking system to ensure that the same interpreter is assigned to the same case going forward without having to open other applications to do so.

By conducting the requirements gathering, analysis, and options analysis, the Administrative Office of the Courts will be laying the foundation for implementing a statewide solution to address this key need of the state's courts.

Fully describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents and specific populations served:

This decision package would impact Washingtonians who have Limited English Proficiency and those who are deaf and hard of hearing. Approximately 8 percent of Washington's total population is considered Limited English Proficiency, approximately 488,800 Washingtonians. About 4 percent are deaf and hard of hearing, approximately 254,619 Washingtonians. Every courthouse in Washington State has served, will serve, or currently is serving people from the Limited English Proficiency and deaf and hard of hearing community, who make up over 7% of our community, or over 500,000 Washingtonians.

Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why they were rejected as solutions:

This will be the first time the agency has done a full analysis on interpreter scheduling; thus, alternatives have not yet been identified or explored.

What are the consequences of not funding this request?

If this request is not funded, courts will continue to use their current processes to schedule interpreters. The current processes include third-party software systems, local systems, or manual processes. The interpreter scheduling process

will remain with each court and the Administrative Office of the Courts will not offer interpreter scheduling as a statewide service.

Is this an expansion or alteration of a current program or service?

This would be an expansion of current programming that the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts provides to support the trial courts in ensuring high quality interpreter services.

Current programs include the Court Interpreter Program that oversees the training and testing of certified and registered spoken language interpreters. The Language Access Interpreter Reimbursement Program that channels state funding to trial courts for the provision of interpreter services, and the Interpreter Commission that focuses its work on identifying policy and programming to support the courts in providing access to persons who are Limited English Proficient and deaf and hard of hearing.

The Washington Administrative Office of the Courts has been certifying court interpreters as to their competency and accuracy since 1990. This request would expand the current program by providing a software application for all courts to enable scheduling of interpreters for court proceedings. The software application would also make it easier for courts to receive reimbursement for interpreter services through the Language Access Interpreter Reimbursement Program.

Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:

This package would require contracting professional services. A contract would be required to procure consultants to conduct requirements gathering for the proposed software system to provide interpreter scheduling service. Then, the same consultants would conduct a market survey, options analysis and feasibility study to determine possible paths forward to provide the interpreter scheduling service.

Expenditures by Object		<u>FY 2024</u>	<u>FY 2025</u>	<u>FY 2026</u>	<u>FY 2027</u>	<u>FY 2028</u>	<u>FY 2029</u>
C	Personal Service Contract	120,000	120,000				
	Total Objects	120,000	120,000	0	0	0	0

How does the package relate to the Judicial Branch principal policy objectives?

This package directly advances two Judicial Branch policy objectives: Accessibility and Commitment to Effective Court Management.

This package supports the objective of Accessibility by promoting equal access to justice for all individuals regardless of their ability to communicate in the spoken English language. Language interpreters play an essential role in ensuring due process and helping court proceedings function efficiently and effectively.

This package supports the objective of Commitment to Effective Court Management by making a state-provided software application available for courts to schedule court interpreters. This application would reduce costs to courts currently using third-party software products and would provide courts using manual process a more efficient process to complete this vital function.

Are there impacts to other governmental entities?

This package would impact trial and appellate courts by providing a software application to facilitate the scheduling of interpreters for court proceedings. Courts currently use a variety of processes to schedule interpreters, including third-party software systems, local systems, and manual processes. This package would allow courts to elect to use a central

service provided by the Administrative Office of the Courts to accomplish this function. The Administrative Office of the Courts expects that the courts will support his package.

Stakeholder response:

Credentialed Court Interpreters
Members of the Legal Aid and Access to Justice Community
Washington State Coalition for Language Access
Persons who are Limited English Proficient
Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Advocates of Immigrant and Refugee Populations

The Administrative Office of the Courts anticipates that these stakeholders will be supportive of this package as it will allow courts using the software application to use the same process to schedule interpreters.

Are there legal or administrative mandates that require this package to be funded?

There are no legal or administrative mandates that require that this package be funded.

Does current law need to be changed to successfully implement this package?

No changes to current law are required to successfully implement this package.

Are there impacts to state facilities?

This request does not impact any state facilities.

Are there other supporting materials that strengthen the case for this request?

There are no other supporting materials for this request.

Are there information technology impacts?

There are no information technology impacts for this request.

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