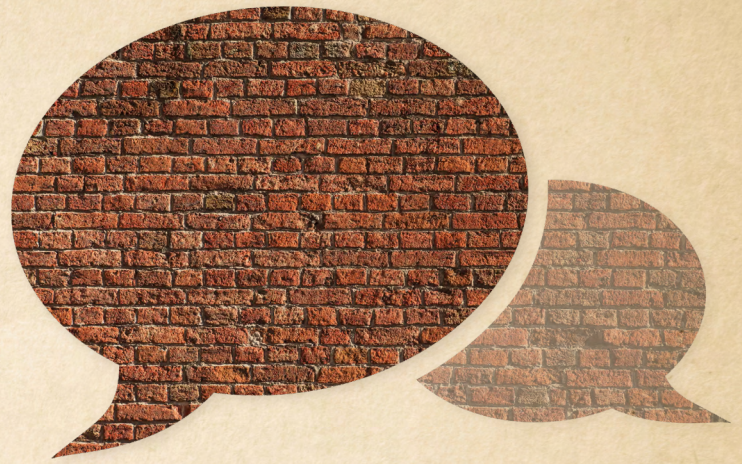


Justice Disrupted

Improving Language Access at the
Massachusetts Trial Courts

OCTOBER 2025



SUMMARY

Limited English proficient (LEP) and Deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) individuals face considerable barriers when interacting with the Massachusetts Trial Courts. For everyone to have equal access to justice in our legal system, the Court must provide those who are better served in a language other than English with interpretation and translation services. Our research reveals where court users have access to language services, where their access to justice is lacking, and changes the Court can implement to address these shortfalls.

88%

Of Advocate and Attorney Survey respondents shared that after court proceedings, their clients never received court documents in their preferred language.

77%

Of court watchers noted delays in court proceedings due to the absence of or need to call an interpreter.

2-3 hours

Wait times to access an interpreter spanned from an hour (with the most prevalent response being 2-3 hours) to multiple days or even weeks or months.

“

[I had to] look for an interpreter at Dunkin Donuts to help [me].”

– FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

“

Once the client was at court the entire day and had to come [the] next day because the interpreter never showed.”

– ADVOCATE AND ATTORNEY SURVEY RESPONDENT

Research conducted by the Courts Language Access Working Group of the Massachusetts Language Access Coalition

KEY FINDINGS

Through our qualitative research, we engaged impacted court users, attorneys, and advocates, and we identified the following key themes and findings:

- There are inconsistencies and challenges when coordinating language services with the Court.
- It is difficult to navigate the courthouse given insufficient multilingual signage.
- There is a lack of translated documents for LEP court users.
- Given that there are not enough court interpreters, court users often must rely on nonprofessionals to interpret or wait days, weeks, or months for this service.
- Court staff have limited cultural responsiveness skills.
- There are significant gaps in language access in languages other than Spanish.
- Language request processes are unclear and inaccessible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Implement more self-help tools in multiple languages
- 2 Make standby interpreters available
- 3 Assess language needs of communities in each court's jurisdiction
- 4 Increase the number of multilingual help desks
- 5 Post more multilingual signage in courthouses
- 6 Train court staff on cultural responsiveness
- 7 Appoint dedicated staff to oversee process of language access requests
- 8 Make use of visual aids to assist court users
- 9 Translate essential court documents



I think I would've found it difficult to determine what room to go to if I had not been able to speak English. I had to speak to multiple court officials and was redirected multiple times... the rooms are not clearly marked even in English, let alone in another language."

– COURT WATCHER

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