

ata **American Translators Association**
The Voice of Interpreters and Translators

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Statement Opposing Discontinuing Immigration Interpreting Services

In light of reports that the U.S. Department of Justice plans to discontinue the use of spoken language interpreters at initial hearings for individuals facing potential deportation from the U.S., the American Translators Association—the U.S.’s largest professional association for translators and interpreters—wishes to express our opposition to this misguided and potentially dangerous change in policy.

Qualified, professional interpreters serve as a communication bridge between individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) and the U.S. justice system. Without access to a qualified, professional interpreter, individuals facing deportation from the U.S. cannot understand their rights, and cannot understand the process by which their eligibility for entry to the U.S. will be determined.

We understand that the Department of Justice’s plan is to replace in-person interpreters with videos in various languages, explaining an individual’s rights and the deportation hearing process. While—in theory—this may seem like a time- and cost-saving solution, it is likely to result in additional delays and costs, and in potential due process violations. We ask that the following issues be considered:

-It is not uncommon for individuals seeking asylum in the U.S. to speak indigenous languages, or to be illiterate or semi-literate in their native language. How will due process be ensured if we do not know what languages the participants speak, or if these languages are covered by the video information? What will happen if these individuals have limited English proficiency, and require assistance to read documents in their native languages?

-How will judges respond to questions about the hearing process and about these individuals’ rights? The right to due process on U.S. soil applies not only to U.S. citizens, but to all individuals. How will we ensure that due process is respected, if judges cannot communicate with these individuals?

-We know that the U.S. immigration system already faces a crushing backlog of cases. What will happen if this backlog increases due to appeals being filed by individuals who cite unfair treatment, lack of due process, or an inability to understand their rights due to a lack of language services?

Qualified, professional interpreters are an integral part of the immigration review process. They allow meaningful and complete participation of LEP individuals in these vital hearings, where their long-term safety and welfare hangs in the balance. Professional interpreting also benefits the immigration courts and immigration judges, allowing for necessary dialogue and questioning as needed by the court, which is responsible for making legally-binding determinations based on the law and facts of each case. This is impossible to accomplish if communication is one-way.

We understand that time and money are critical resources that must be efficiently managed. At the same time, the right to due process on U.S. soil is part of the fabric of our nation, and it is how we expect other nations to treat U.S. citizens. Fair and equal treatment under the law is not a right reserved for U.S. citizens; it is a fundamental human right that risks being violated if interpreting services for deportation hearings are eliminated.

The American Translators Association firmly opposes this decision and asks that qualified, professional interpreters be used at all phases of the immigration and deportation hearing process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Corinne McKay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Corinne McKay
President

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