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How Coalitions Can Help Legal Aid Attorneys Improve Access for Their Limited-English-Proficient Clients

By Leticia Camacho and Gillian Dutton

Leticia Camacho
Staff Attorney

Gillian Dutton
Senior Attorney

Northwest Justice Project
401 Second Ave. S. Suite 407
Seattle, WA 98104
206.464.1519
leticia@nwjustice.org
206.464.1519
jilld@nwjustice.org

In the United States today one in every eight residents is an immigrant.¹ Many of these immigrants are described by the term “limited-English-proficient,” or “LEP,” which refers to both those who speak no English and those who speak English less than very well.² Poor LEP immigrants—and their English-speaking U.S. citizen counterparts—need access to legal assistance to preserve jobs, housing, education, family, benefits, and health. Without adequate language interpretation and translation services, however, LEP residents are unable to enforce their legal rights, and their access to services is reduced.

Lawyers have been dealing with such language issues since even before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited federally funded entities from discriminating against individuals on the basis of national origin.³ To require agencies and service providers to have interpreters and translators, lawyers have filed complaints with state and federal civil rights offices, sued for failure of due process, and advocated the passage of stronger language-access laws and better enforcement of laws.⁴ Beyond this, we argue that developing a coalition of providers, advocates, interpreters, and translators can make advocacy more effective and more efficient. It can also create stakeholders who will continue to improve language access in their own organizations.

¹For more on the number of documented and undocumented immigrants in the United States, see Josh Bernstein & Jonathan Blazer, *Legalizing Undocumented Immigrants: An Essential Tool in Fighting Poverty*, 42 CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW 408 (Nov.–Dec. 2008).

²The term “LEP” has been interpreted by some as slightly pejorative and abandoned in favor of the term “English language learners,” which does not really express that some individuals are unable to learn any English at all. We use “LEP” since it is more precise than “ELL” and used in many laws, codes, and administrative documents.

³See *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563, 568 (1974) (national origin interpreted to mean language as well).

⁴Examples of these laws in Washington State are discussed here. For more legal resources, see Empire Justice Center, Language Access Resource Center, http://onlineresources.wnyc.net/pb/orcdocs/language_access.asp.

In describing the development and work of one such coalition in Washington State, we offer some tips for how advocates around the country can support one another to develop similar coalitions and strengthen advocacy for LEP clients. We discuss the benefits of a coalition in language-access work and show examples of how the coalition has helped improve interpreter and translator services in the courts, in law enforcement, and within agencies and institutions.

LEP Advocacy in Washington State

Advocacy on behalf of LEP clients in Washington State consists in, among other approaches, filing of civil rights complaints, work on court administrative rules, development of legislation, and, most recently, the creation of a coalition of providers, interpreters, and translators. All have enabled our state to make slow but steady progress in expanding interpreter services.

Filing Complaints Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Washington State lawyers whose clients were unable to access hospital, school, and welfare services filed, with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights, complaints alleging discrimination. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of national origin and requires those receiving funding from the federal government to take reasonable steps to ensure access to their programs, services, and information.⁵ Over a period of years, separate complaints against a Seattle hospital, the Seattle School District, the Washington

State Department of Social and Health Services, and the Washington State Employment Security Department resulted in agreements, and eventually in consent decrees, establishing procedures for having interpreters translate and orally communicate some documents.⁶

Experience with these complaints shows that, in order for agencies to implement a program of interpretation and translation services, legal aid attorneys needed to stay involved in the development and monitoring of these services. Negotiating the *Reyes v. Washington Department of Social and Health Services* consent decree led to the establishment of one of the most comprehensive interpreter-service programs in the country.⁷ Washington State's welfare agency developed systems to evaluate a welfare applicant's LEP status, provide interpreter services, and translate all notices requiring a response or notifying the recipient of any departmental action.⁸ The department supplies simultaneous translation of all forms and notices in the six most common languages in Washington State besides English and translates notices to all other LEP individuals in more than seventy other languages through a contract for translation services.

Perhaps more important, the department agreed that, for services to be effective, it needed to use qualified interpreters or qualified bilingual staff members. This led to the development of an interpreter certification and testing program that is still the only one in the country operated by a state agency.⁹ Critics point out that the test has some failings and that it was not properly validated for all of the

⁵See 42 U.S.C. § 2000d (2005). The prohibition against discrimination on the basis of language was later extended to federal agencies (see Exec. Order No. 13,166 (Aug. 11, 2000), www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/Pubs/eolep.php). For more information on federal laws and individual agency guidance, see Limited English Proficiency: A Federal Interagency Website, www.lep.gov (last visited Feb. 10, 2009).

⁶For a compilation of these and other consent decrees, see National Health Law Program, www.healthlaw.org/library/.

⁷*Reyes v. Washington Department of Social and Health Services*, No. C91-303 (W.D. Wash. March 4, 1991), [www.healthlaw.org/library/folder.99678-Washington \(consent decree\)](http://www.healthlaw.org/library/folder.99678-Washington%20consent%20decrees).

⁸For more on the department's policy and services, see Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, www.dshs.wa.gov.

⁹Department certification from the Language Testing and Certification Program is available in eight languages with a screening test available in all other languages (see Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Language Testing and Certification Program, www.dshs.wa.gov/msa/ltc/).

languages tested.¹⁰ Nonetheless, without some way of testing interpreter knowledge of ethics, English, and the target language, agencies and advocates alike would be unable to determine an interpreter's skill level.¹¹ Because the consent decree covered medical services to welfare recipients, both certification and reimbursement pertained also to interpreters for medical appointments.¹² To continue to update these services through call centers and online applications and as other changes are implemented, the department relies on an internal system of LEP cluster coordinators who meet regularly to revise policies and develop training for staff members.

Working with the Courts. While civil rights complaints helped push agencies to develop policies to improve services, advocates and judicial staff members pursued a range of strategies to increase services at the courthouse. Passed in 1989, Washington State's statute relating to interpreters requires that litigants be accorded interpreters in all criminal and civil proceedings.¹³ In civil proceedings where the litigant is not compelled to appear, an interpreter is assigned without charge only if the litigant is indigent.¹⁴ Washington State began certifying and training interpreters through its Administrative Office of the Courts.

This work was later augmented through the establishment of the Interpreter Advisory Commission (see below). Efforts to improve interpreter certification and training were helped by the creation of two interpreter and translator organizations, the Washington State Court Interpreters and Translators Society (www.witsnet.org) and the Northwest Translators and Interpreters Society (www.notisnet.org). Washington State boasted one of the model systems of courthouse interpreter training and mentoring.¹⁵ Nonetheless, full implementation of courthouse services was uneven due to Washington State's decentralized court system and inadequate funding.

Developing Collaboration and Best Practices in the Medical Provider Community. Interpreting and translation in the medical community have long evolved as medical providers seek both to improve quality and efficiency and to reduce costs.¹⁶ The implementation of the reimbursement of medical interpreters under the *Reyes* consent decree was a mixed blessing: the decree mandated funding for interpreters but difficulties arose when state-budget cuts led to a brokerage system in 2003.¹⁷ While many hospitals and clinics informally shared best practices in recruitment, training, and scheduling, attempts were made to formalize

¹⁰Cindy Roat, *The Certification Blues: Pitfalls and Peaks Along the Road to Certifying Medical Interpreters*, DiversityRx (March 25, 2003), www.diversityrx.org/html/MOIPR5.htm.

¹¹Court certification is offered in Washington State but available in nine languages only through the National Consortium of State Courts. Washington State recently implemented a "registry" program to test interpreter knowledge of ethics and both English and about fifty target languages.

¹²See *Reyes*, No. C91-303.

¹³WASH. REV. CODE § 2.43.030 (2008).

¹⁴*Id.* § 2.43.040.

¹⁵See U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Executive Order 13166 Limited English Proficiency Resource Document: Tips and Tools from the Field (Sept. 21, 2004), www.lep.gov/guidance/tips_and_tools-9-21-04.htm.

¹⁶For a comprehensive look at such services nationally, see Mara Youdelman & Jane Perkins, *Providing Language Interpretation Services in Health Care Settings: Examples from the Field* (May 2002), www.commonwealthfund.org/usr_doc/youdelman_languageinterp_541.pdf?section=4039.

¹⁷"Brokerage" refers to a system in which the department contracts with agencies or "brokers" who take on the task of finding, hiring, and scheduling interpreters, thus relieving the department of the need to contract with individual interpreters. The department sets the price it will pay the broker for each interpreter visit, and the broker takes a portion of the money and passes on a smaller amount to the individual interpreters themselves.

the collaboration.¹⁸ Even though these improvements were not always shared by the medical provider community as a whole, they exemplify the strength of stakeholders in improving services within their organizations.

Other health organizations, while sharing resources, dealt with situations in which, due to insufficient training and certification programs, particularly in rural areas outside Seattle and King County, no interpreter was available when needed. A study recommended ways to improve quality and certification but pointed to the lack of coordination on having interpreters as one reason that community colleges were not confident that graduates of such training programs would find steady employment.¹⁹

Working to Expand Access. Gaps in interpretation and translation services remained. Advocates in Washington State noted that some interpreter services were of high quality but others were nonexistent. Legal aid lawyers, advocates concerned with domestic violence, courthouse staff members, medical providers, state and government agencies, interpreters and translators, law enforcement officers, and clients themselves complained that interpreters were missing and that providers were unaware of the need for cultural competence. Spring of 2005 marked the first time these groups met and decided to form a coalition. At a Wyoming meeting sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice, the coalition put priority on the creation of internal written LEP policies, development of train-

ing resources, and establishment of an interpreter and translator database.

The coalition developed a website and work groups to help write LEP policies, share technology, and streamline the database. The coalition has expanded by holding annual statewide conferences—opportunities for networking, education, and discussion of shared goals.²⁰ Creating a coalition in Washington State led to sharing resources from the national networks such as the National Language Access Advocacy Network.²¹ The network has been sponsoring a conference on language-access issues before the annual National Legal Aid and Defender Association conference. The coalition continues to organize and share best practices and is putting together a national agenda to improve language access.

These efforts interweave with work on the federal level. The federal interagency LEP work group consists of representatives from more than thirty-five federal agencies and was formed at the request of the assistant attorney general for civil rights. Each in the last two years the Federal Interagency Working Group on Limited English Proficiency held a conference in Washington, D.C., to highlight advances by agencies at the national level and to showcase work from around the country.²² Such conferences are useful since they connect advocates with resources and individuals who can help them further their work at the state and local level. They also help bridge the gap among providers in sharing technology and best practices.

¹⁸A meeting entitled “Collaborative Strategies for Language Access in Seattle [and] King County” and convened on February 6 and 7, 2003, by Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, brought together key stakeholders involved in providing language-access services in health care in Seattle and in King County, Washington, the twelfth largest county in the nation with a 16 percent (272,000 persons) foreign-born population and 20 percent of the over-5-years-of-age population speaking a language other than English at home (see Christine Wilson Owens & J. Carey Jackson, Collaborative Strategies for Language Access in Health Care in Seattle [and] King County: Meeting Report (n.d.), http://ethnomed.org/chc/language_access/access_report.pdf).

¹⁹Choice Regional Health Network, Quality Assurance Recommendations for Health Care Interpreting in Washington State (Dec. 15, 2006), www.crhn.org/tusalud/wings/QARecs.pdf.

²⁰For information on the organization and conferences, see Washington State Coalition for Language Access, www.wascla.org.

²¹The National Language Access Advocacy Network grew out of a group of attorneys who had been exchanging ideas on improving access to services around the United States. The group held its second annual conference in November 2008 and has expanded resources and information (see National Language Access Advocates Network, www.probono.net/nlaan/news).

²²For information on the work of the coalition and agendas of recent conferences, see Federal Interagency Working Group on Limited English Proficiency, www.lep.gov/iwglep.htm.

Using Coalitions to Supplement Traditional Advocacy

Forming and working within a coalition have enhanced our individual advocacy on behalf of LEP clients. The benefits and efficiencies of coalitions make it worthwhile to consider their use in advocacy for language access.

More Collaborative than Confrontational. Improving language access involves educating providers—about why interpreters are needed, why using friends and family members is ineffective (not just illegal), and why learning another language to the degree of skill needed to navigate legal and medical issues is so difficult. Improving language access is also having providers honestly assess their system in an environment where shortcomings can be openly discussed. Coalitions allow both such educating providers and assessment to take place. Many of the advocacy groups that participated in the initial meeting of our Washington State Coalition for Language Access had available interpreters but did not have a formal LEP policy. Participation in our coalition allowed these groups to gain information and expertise in creating or improving their own policies. For example, Northwest Justice Project drafted a new policy to improve services to the deaf and hard-of-hearing after certified deaf interpreters using American Sign Language joined our coalition and raised issues of service to the deaf population in Washington State.²³ By sharing in the discussion of the need for services and how to deliver them, coalition participants can exchange information about barriers and ways to overcome them. Such discussion does not always result in the development of a policy, but, as long as policies are recognized as being legally required, collaboration may

lead to realistic policies and implementation, not just a blanket promise to provide services in order to get a complaint resolved.

Perspectives of Interpreters and Translators. For years, lawyers and administrators have been devising systems to improve language access without really involving interpreters and translators. Despite evidence to the contrary, interpreters are seen as “interested parties” who will only advocate higher pay and not be unbiased in their commitment to quality services. They command little power and respect within hierarchical and bureaucratic systems that give authority to doctors and lawyers. And, since most interpreters and translators are “freelance” and paid only when performing their work, their participation in language-access work requires them to forgo paid work during normal business hours when they are trying to maximize their income.²⁴

Yet interpreter and translator participation is crucial. Interpreters and translators know best whether their services are being used, whether the services are of high quality, and whether systems for payment, scheduling of personnel, and development of training materials and glossaries are really efficient and effective. Coalitions allow interpreters and translators to participate; coalitions underscore that no policy or implementation should be undertaken without their input.

Shared Information, Best Practices, and Technology. A coalition is, by definition, composed loosely of divergent groups. One factor that leads to delay and lack of coordination in the provision of interpreter services is that social service agencies are not organized in the same

²³Many people born and raised in the United States may be fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). Other deaf individuals, such as recent immigrants, may not have received formal training in either ASL or English. They may use a system of “home sign” language to communicate. Deaf or hard-of-hearing clients who have minimal language skills (e.g., the use of “home sign” language solely) may require the skills of a certified deaf interpreter skilled in the client’s “home sign” language. These interpreters are deaf individuals who know both ASL and home signs and need to use a relay system with an English-speaking ASL interpreter for the deaf client’s information to be accurately conveyed.

²⁴One survey of interpreters for the deaf and hard-of-hearing in Ohio highlighted the problems, such as low earnings, faced by many interpreters (see Task Force of the Interpreting and Sign Language Resources Advisory Committee, Ohio K-12 Educational Interpreter Working Conditions (June 2008), www.ohioschoolforthe deaf.org/resources/3/Resources/WorkingConditionsReportFinal.pdf). Our coalition is also planning to administer a survey developed by the Washington State Court Interpreters and Translators Society.

way as advocacy organizations, medical providers, or courts. Issues in the provision of services are taken up in isolation, without the benefit of sharing of best practices and technology. In Washington State our coalition allows all members to hear about innovations in video interpretation, translation, finding resources, and scheduling by showcasing best practices and technology at its conferences.

Members' Resources Harnessed. At least a few individuals in many states' advocacy organizations, agencies, and courts work on language access as part of their jobs. When these individuals form a coalition, they can share resources even if no separate organization is established. In Washington State, civil legal aid providers share information with court administrators, law enforcement personnel, hospital staff members, agency staff members, and interpreter program coordinators. By setting goals such as the development of a website and training materials, research into a database, and establishment of a curriculum, our coalition has made steady progress not likely achievable had each member worked alone. Although our coalition is planning to develop a more formal organization, it has been able meanwhile to sponsor conferences, a website, and other projects by asking for voluntary financial contributions from members and by having all share in contributing time and expertise.²⁵

Information Reinforced. Educating providers and clients about quality interpreter and translator services is critical to improving services, and coalitions can emphasize such education by spreading knowledge to the community in a way that individual litigation or complaints cannot due to confidentiality and privacy concerns. Because a coalition continually adds new members needing to be updated and incorporated, information must be readily available. Members can take the information back to their own organizations and serve as teachers and catalysts for further improvement of language access. Because members of a coalition share information openly and monitor

improvements, the coalition encourages progress and shares success, motivating positive change.

Quality Interpretation. Improving language access requires a number of steps: development of a written policy with guidelines for staff members, training staff members in how to work with interpreters, establishment of procedures for obtaining interpretation and translation services when necessary, and monitoring implementation. All these may take place and still result in poor service if insufficient attention is paid to obtaining quality interpretation. Because a coalition has interpreters and translators and gives them a larger voice, issues of interpreter training, certification, reimbursement, and recruitment can be considered. In Washington State, attempts to get community colleges to add courses on interpreting had been unsuccessful since college boards were reluctant to approve training programs without success in placing graduates in employment.

There is general agreement that interpreters cannot become skilled without formal training and practice. The difficulty encountered by interpreters trying to make a living wage may be due, however, to inefficient scheduling systems, long travel times, cancellations, and lack of an easy way to advertise their services. Interpreters work with agencies or brokers to increase their weekly hours but are still not able to work as much as they would like. Interpreter hourly rates appear artificially high (ranging from \$50 to \$90 per hour) because they do not account for costs such as gas, benefits, and unreimbursed waiting periods and because interpreters are not always able to work full-time.

In Washington State, decreases in interpreter reimbursement due to budget cuts have resulted in more qualified interpreters leaving to find stable employment. For legal aid providers, this can mean inaccurate information and need for repeat interviews and investigation due to poor-quality interpreting. It can also mean that no interpreters are avail-

²⁵For conference materials from the latest summit, see Washington State Coalition for Language Access, Summit IV Materials, www.wascla.org/RTF1.cfm?pagename=Summit%20IV%20Materials.

able and requests for interpreters go unfilled. The result is that the legal requirement to have interpreters becomes an empty promise. Thus our coalition's work to obtain technology to assist in the scheduling and location of interpreter resources becomes a crucial part of language-access advocacy. Our coalition is hoping to establish a searchable interpreter and translator registry for interpreters and translators to describe their qualifications, location, and skills.

How Our Coalition Has Improved Language Access

Since the establishment of the Washington State Coalition for Language Access in May 2005, members of the coalition have coordinated their work on language access—with beneficial implications for the development of language-access work that advocates in other states may want to consider. Much of our coalition work is still unfinished, but here are some examples of how the coalition has supported the improvement of interpreter and translator services.

Access to the Courts. Attorneys must look to different sources of law for requirements to have interpreters and translators in different settings. In Washington State the Interpreter Advisory Commission was established on June 3, 1999, by supreme court order, which set for it a five-year period of operation and made it permanent in 2005. Consisting of three committees (Issues; Disciplinary; and Judicial and Court Administration Education), the commission helps guide the work of the interpreter program under the Administrative Office of the Courts.

The Issues Committee deals with any complaints regarding interpreters. If an interpreter complaint is not resolved, it is referred to the Disciplinary Committee, which can decertify or deny certification of an interpreter for violations involving continuing education, interpreter code of conduct, and professional standards or for legal violations. The Judicial and Court Administration Education Committee ensures the provision of training and resource opportunities to judicial officers and court administrators.

The commission has developed a comprehensive interpreter certification program and a policy manual directing the operation of the interpreter program. The commission advises the Administrative Office of the Courts staff members of the interpreter program, which operates a system of court certification involving both training and testing of candidates.

Since the inclusion of Administrative Office of the Courts staff members in our coalition and of other coalition members on the commission committees, community education and input have been enhanced. A good example of this can be seen in the work to develop a uniform model language-assistance policy which can be adapted by Washington State's independent system of courts. A year or so before the creation of our coalition, legal aid attorneys began work with commission staff members regarding uneven services in courts throughout Washington State. This work, with legal aid attorneys and judges from several parts of the state and Administrative Office of the Courts staff members, resulted in the creation of a model language-assistance plan. Judges and Administrative Office of the Courts staff members became educated about levels of service around the state and potential barriers. For instance, judges and interpreters in the eastern part of the state mentioned long travel distances, majority Spanish-speaking populations, and sparse population as differences from court environments in the western part of the state. Scheduling, translation of forms and informational pamphlets, and use of technology had different requirements that needed to be outlined in the model plan so that they could be fleshed out by the local courts.

The plan made clear that both its development and increased funding for interpreters would enhance the likelihood of success. Our coalition's conference became the place where court personnel could discuss local and regional needs. The conference was also an opportunity to link up with interpreter and translator associations.

Membership in the commission was crucial to developing new policies and

helping disseminate information to attorneys, court staff members, and interpreters and translators. The commission and the Administrative Office of the Courts developed guidelines for the distribution of \$2 million in funding allocated by the Washington State Legislature for interpreter costs and language-assistance plan implementation during the 2008 and 2009 fiscal years. The key requirement of the plan's funding was that courts must have an Administrative Office of the Courts-approved language-access plan in order to apply for funding. Encouraging use of available certified interpreters was a key criterion. The latest data show that 102 courts and five county clerks had a language-access plan on file with the Administrative Office of the Courts.²⁶ The office received a State Justice Institute technical assistance grant to assist the courts (one office staff member is so dedicated) in developing best practices in implementing language-access plans.

Helping the development of written court plans, the commission can rely on a broader group of individuals for participation in presentations. These presentations involve collaboration among the commission, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Washington State Court Interpreters and Translators Society. Presentation examples, among others, are those on interpreter best practices at the Judicial College, one at a plenary session at the District and Municipal Court Judges' Association conference, and those on language-access plans and funding before court administrators at the superior court administrators' conference in April 2008. Such presentations are both regional and national.²⁷

The commission has improved the translation of mandatory forms. These are forms used by courts throughout Washington State in criminal and civil matters. To ensure that forms posted are accurate and of high quality, the commission approved a protocol for translators, editors, and reviewers of translated state forms (we have the protocol in our files). The protocol requires the certification of the primary and secondary translator (referred to as an editor) by a national translation organization or academic program or five years of legal-translation work experience and the submission of five work references and five translation samples. Certification or registration as a court interpreter is preferable but not required. The protocol requires that an editor (or two additional others) review the primary translator's work for accuracy and completeness. Each completed assignment must have a glossary of terms, and future translators must use the master glossary that is developed. Adherence to the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators' code of ethics is required.²⁸ The criteria apply equally to translation service contracts resulting from a sole source and to request-for-proposal procurement methods. The protocol must be met before translated state forms can be posted on the official Administrative Office of the Courts website.

Access to Law Enforcement, Emergency, and City Services. One case discussed at the first coalition meeting of law enforcement officers, domestic violence advocates, and family law attorneys and still described on the coalition website alarmingly illustrates the danger of delayed or inadequate access to interpreter services:

²⁶See generally Washington Courts, Washington State Court Interpreter Program, www.courts.wa.gov/programs%5Ffor%5Fpos%5Finterpret/.

²⁷A panel presented at the Fifty-first Washington Judicial Conference in Spokane, Washington, October 2008. A panel presentation on "Enhancing Language Access in our Justice System" was held at the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts: Celebrating the Courts in an Inclusive Society—Ensuring Fairness in America's Courts, Seattle, Washington, April 29–May 2, 2008.

²⁸See National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators, Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities (n.d.), www.najit.org/documents/NAJIT%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf.

A [m]onolingual Spanish-speaking woman called 911 on a Friday morning. She was not able to speak to the operator because of the lack of language [interpretation] and eventually hung up. However, two non-Spanish-speaking officers did show up at the apartment where she and her husband were living with their two children and extended family. The family woke up a 17-year-old nephew sleeping on the couch to act as the interpreter. Officers did not arrest the husband. After they left, the woman went to the Mexican Consulate seeking help. The Consulate told her about getting an Order for Protection. The woman, accompanied by her relatives, went to the Courthouse where she filed a Petition for an Order for Protection with the assistance of the court facilitators. By the time she completed the paperwork, it was too late for the Commissioner to hear the case. The woman was told to return on Monday. The husband killed her on Sunday morning, at the family home, while the rest of the family was in the apartment, including the children.²⁹

The coalition worked with the Seattle Police Department and the city government as they implemented a revised policy. Officers in the police and sheriff's department realized that they did not have ready access to their own LEP policies. They embarked on a revision to educate staff members about why family members should not be used as interpreters. The coalition has also worked with local 911 and 211 agencies to make sure they have adequate access to interpreter services. At a recent coalition conference, interpreters and translators offered to help in the establishment and training of a community interpreter program in re-

sponse to a complaint filed with the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division for the failure of law enforcement officers to have interpreters in Mattawa, Washington, a small town in a rural area in eastern Washington with little access to court-certified interpreters.³⁰

Improving Services Within Agencies and Creating an Interagency Work Group. Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services has a long history of providing interpreter services. The coalition's forum on improvements in quality of such services was a catalyst for improvement on behalf of its members. Incidents such as failing to provide services can be attended to systemically rather than on a case-by-case basis. The most recent coalition conference featured a panel of staff members from the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Health, and the Employment Security Department; all described their services and their LEP policy development. At the same conference a Seattle hospital demonstrated the use of an innovative videoconferencing technology allowing doctors and patients to access an on-site interpreter through a video screen. Conferences motivate participants to finalize drafts and improve policies. Due to the complexity of having interpreters and translators at large government institutions and private agencies such as hospitals, the coalition is planning a state-level meeting of large-scale providers to discuss how sharing resources and technology can improve services and reduce costs.

Coordinated Access to Interpreter and Translator Resources. The need to establish quick and easy access to interpreter and translator services has been a goal from the coalition's first meeting. The coalition has investigated possible resources in California and Minnesota and is hopeful that a registry or database

²⁹See www.wascla.org, *supra* note 20.

³⁰See Pat Muir, *Mattawa Program a Matter of Interpretation*, YakimaHerald.com Online News, April 28, 2008, www.lawhelp.org/documents/387311Mattawa%20Newspaper%20Article%20on%20Interpreters%20and%20DOJ%20Settlement.pdf.

will soon be available. The coalition has helped create two statewide surveys—one on interpreter and translator usage by providers and the other on the needs of interpreters and translators themselves. The coalition plans to use the results of these surveys to help design a database that will both increase interpreters' and translators' employment and allow Washington State providers to expand their services to meet needs.



While work to improve language access in Washington State is far from complete, the formation of a coalition has al-

lowed advocates and coalition members to build on prior successes and forge a statewide movement to improve services. For advocates used to the traditional approach of filing complaints in court or at an agency's office for civil rights, the coalition has nurtured the hope to make a leap forward by taking a unified and collaborative approach. The coalition has allowed us to participate in a kind of work that we aspire to but rarely achieve—the empowerment of our clients and the community in the fight to enlarge access to justice.

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