

AOC announces court interpreter credentialing program

October 31, 2011

The Mississippi Administrative Office of Courts will conduct its first Court Interpreter Workshop Nov. 3 and 4 at the Gartin Justice Building, 450 High Street in Jackson. Workshop presentations are scheduled 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the first floor training room.

The workshop is intended to introduce prospective foreign language interpreters to interpreting in a legal setting including the courtroom, depositions and other legal proceedings. Court interpreters must understand court proceedings as well as be fluent in English and a second language.

The Administrative Office of Courts is working toward creation of a statewide program to provide credentialing of language interpreters for court proceedings. The AOC adopted Standards for Court Interpreters and a Code of Ethics for Court Interpreters on Oct. 17. The rules for court interpreters apply to municipal court, justice court, youth court, county court, circuit court, chancery court and grand jury proceedings.

The rules for court interpreters and Code of Ethics are on the Mississippi Judiciary web site at this link: <http://courts.ms.gov/aoc/courtinterpreter/resources.html>.

AOC Deputy Director Lisa Counts said, "Understanding and exercising legal rights may be difficult for people of limited English proficiency. The language barrier could result in the denial of meaningful access to the justice system."

The Administrative Office of Courts developed the Mississippi Court Interpreter Credentialing Program to assist the courts in Mississippi in their endeavor to provide equal access to justice for limited English proficiency individuals.

Currently, each court in the state makes its own arrangements when language interpreters are needed in a court proceeding. The AOC program will provide judges in all state courts with the resource of a list of language interpreters who have demonstrated proficiency in oral and written translation of court proceedings. The credentialing program will provide two levels of proficiency: registered and certified. Language interpreters may be included on the list after having completed the AOC's credentialing program.

The workshop is the first step in a program which will train, certify, and test individuals who wish to serve as interpreters in the courtrooms of Mississippi. The workshop will outline the requirements to achieve credentialing as a registered or certified courtroom interpreter. Written and verbal testing as well as background checks are required.

Registered and certified court interpreters will be required to renew certification after three years. Interpreters must complete Continuing Interpreter Education hours to renew credentials.

To be successful, interpreters must have a high level of mastery in two languages and be highly skilled in all modes of interpreting. Continuing education will assist interpreters in maintaining these skills as well as integrating new skills.

The Mississippi AOC standards and code of ethics are modeled on standards for language interpretation adopted by the National Center for State Courts' Consortium for Language Access in the Courts. The Mississippi AOC is a member of the Consortium. Court interpreters who are certified in other Consortium member states may seek reciprocity.

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