



Court Interpretation:

Frequently Asked Questions

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RESPONSES:

What is a certified interpreter?

Generally speaking, a certified interpreter is someone who has passed an examination mandated by legislation to assess interpreter competency for court proceedings. A certification exam tests interpreting ability and determines if the interpreter meets certain minimum standards.

Many states "test" language interpreters, but there is no standard meaning of what "certification" means between the states. There is quite a bit of variation in how states handle testing or certification of court interpreters. There are several different kinds of interpreter tests, but not all interpreter tests are recognized by law as certification tests.

Some states have no certification for court interpreters. Some states test interpreters, but don't certify them. In Florida and New York, interpreters are tested and approved by the state but are not certified by the state. New Jersey has a program for qualifying interpreters, but it is not a certification exam.

State and federal courts have different standards and procedures to qualify or certify an interpreter. For the federal courts, the Court Interpreters Act of 1978 mandated that a national certification exam be developed to test for knowledge of both languages and interpreting skill. The National Center now administers the [Federal Court Interpreter Certification Exam Program](#) on behalf of the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts. The National Center also administers the [Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification Program](#), in which [28 states](#) are members.

Who can I contact in my state to find out about interpreter testing/certification?

Contact your state court interpreter program to inquire about their "certification" or "testing" procedure. The Consortium for State Court Interpreters maintains a [Contact List](#). If your state does not have a state court interpreter program, you can check with the [administrative office of the courts](#) in your state.

FAQs about the Consortium for State Court Interpreters

Please refer to "[Frequently Asked Questions about the Consortium](#)," from The National Center Court Interpretation Web pages. The following questions are answered:

- What is the Consortium?
- When and how was the Consortium founded?
- What are the conditions of membership?
- What are the advantages of Consortium membership?
- What tests are available to members?
- Who are the current and potential beneficiaries of the Consortium?
- What problems does the Consortium program address?

How many states are members of the Consortium for State Court Interpreters?

Currently, 29 states are members of the Consortium for State Court Interpreters. The Consortium maintains a [list of member states](#) with the year they joined the Consortium.

Has the Consortium conducted any surveys of court interpreters?

Four surveys were conducted in 1999. Please refer to the following survey results:

- [Certification Requirements Survey—1999](#)
- [Test and Educational Fees Survey—1999](#)
- [Compensation – Salaried Interpreters—1999](#)
- [Compensation – Contract Interpreters—1999](#)

What is the Model Court Interpreter Act?

The Model Court Interpreter Act is based on a review and synthesis of federal law and statutes in

states where comprehensive study and reform of practices and laws relating to the use of interpreters has taken place. The Model Court Interpreter Act discusses policy declaration; definitions; implementation of responsibilities; requirements for a certified interpreter; waiver of interpreter; interpreter oath; removal of an interpreter in individual cases; cost of interpreter services; and appropriation. For the full version of the Model Court Interpreter Act, please refer to William E. Hewitt, *Court Interpretation: Model Guides for Policy and Practice in the State Courts* (Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts, 1995).

Which states have court rules for court interpreters?

Most states have statutes relating to interpreters. Various court rules have also been implemented to facilitate the resolution of issues that may arise when interpreters are used. These rules can be grouped into these general categories: qualification as an expert witness, procedures, competency/professional conduct, grand jury proceedings, fees and costs.

For further details on court rules relating to interpreters, see the 1999 National Center for State Courts, Knowledge and Information Service Memorandum, "[State Court Rules for Language Interpreters](#)," by Madelynn Herman and Anne Endress Skove.

State civil and criminal rule numbers often match their federal rule counterpart; notice that most state rules on interpreters follow the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure in number, content, or both.

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Contact the **Knowledge & Information Service Office** with inquiries
or requests for copies of any resources regarding
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