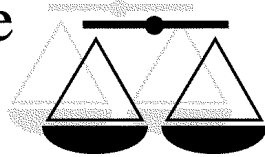


# Regional Law Safety & Justice Committee



THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2018

7:15 – 9:00 A.M.

Seattle City Hall, Bertha Knight Landes Room  
600 4th Ave., Seattle, WA 98104

## **MEETING SUMMARY:**

### **Reaching Limited English Proficiency Populations in disasters and emergencies**

- Robin Pfohman, Public Health – Seattle & King County
- Debbie Goetz, Seattle Emergency Management
- Barnaby Dow, King County Emergency Management

Representatives from King County and Seattle provided information on efforts to comply with state legislation requiring a plan for emergency notification in languages other than English by December 1, 2019.

The area agencies, including Public Health, have been working for years to ensure non-English speaking populations have access to needed and emergency information. There are 9 community health boards that address the needs of specific populations. Outreach with bi- and multi- lingual individuals through the Community Communication Network is particularly important as community members are best placed to get information out to a broader group.

Panel members discussed the benefits and limitations of technology. In emergency situations, automatic translations cannot be used for messaging, as auto translations may not be accurate. Pre-recorded messages and signage can be important components of the communication plan.

While each jurisdiction is individually responsible, the organizations are working together to ensure an aligned response and to avoid duplication of efforts.

The panelists urged RLSJC members to sign up for King County Alert and AlertSeattle. Currently messages are only available in English, but individuals can report which languages they speak through the tool.

See slides and handouts for additional detail.

- **Communication and access to courts for individuals with Limited English Proficiency and those with disabilities**
  - David Lord, Disabilities Rights Washington

- Judge Sean O'Donnell, King County Superior Court, Co-Chair Interpreter Services Funding Task Force and Brady Horenstein, Legislative Relations Administrative Office of the Courts

David Lord, from Disability Rights Washington (DRW), summarized DRW's work in ensuring access to the courts. In addition to providing interpreters, courts can take action to ensure access to individuals with psychiatric disabilities, including providing simplified forms and recognizing whether or not individuals understand what's happening. Mr. Lord emphasized the importance of listening to what people say they need. GR33 which governs court access allows for the provision of counsel as an accommodation. This is not used routinely everywhere, but in some cases it is appropriate for judges to appoint a lawyer to assist people with disabilities.

See handouts for detail.

Judge Sean O'Donnell and Barnaby Horenstien reported out on the Bureau for Justice Assistance's recently published report on Interpreter funding in Washington Courts. Courts across the state have a responsibility to provide interpreters when needed. This has been clear for some time for criminal cases and under the Obama administration it was made clear that this also applies to civil cases. The mechanism for funding these interpreters across the state varies by jurisdiction. Costs are increasing year over year and jurisdictions are feeling a budget crunch.

The State Interpreter Reimbursement program pays for some costs, but the program is severely underfunded. The Bureau for Justice Assistance is lobbying the legislature on behalf of all courts to get additional funding. Judge O'Donnell stressed the importance of legislators hearing from cities and counties on this issue and urged RLSJC members to join in the effort to increase state funding.

While jurisdictions are providing interpreters as required, funding concerns may cause the use of Language Line or other less expensive alternatives to certified interpreters. Increased funding from the state will ensure quality interpreters.

Mr. Horenstien noted that while past efforts have not succeeded in increasing funding for the Interpreter Reimbursement Program, the current effort is focused solely on budget and is not attempting any policy change. He is optimistic that with broad support from local jurisdictions, an increase is possible in the next long legislative session.

Interpreter funding is a clear access to justice issue, as "you cannot access justice if you can't understand what's being said."

Discussion with RLSJC members noted the importance of developing and training skilled interpreters.

#### **Interpretation services in area courts**

- Martha Cohen and Rachael DelVillar, King County Superior Court
- Emma Garkavi and Luisa Gracia, Seattle Municipal Court
- Nicole Walker and Heather Dean, King County District Court

The final panel included interpreter services staff from Superior, District, and Seattle Municipal Courts. The three courts collaborate closely to ensure that interpreter needs are met. A state-wide interpreter list helps to recruit needed interpreters.

The panelists emphasized that it's not a question of whether or not they'll provide attorneys. They will do whatever is necessary, which means flying in out-of-state interpreters and in some cases using phone interpretation. The interpreter services staff spend most of their time handling the 20% of cases that require interpreters for uncommon languages. Superior Court recently added the 164<sup>th</sup> language.

Martha Cohen from Superior Court described the importance of team interpretation for longer events that can occur in Superior Court. Using two interpreters avoids long breaks that are required if only one interpreter is used.

Seattle has recently implemented an interpreter mentoring program to train new interpreters. Interpreters must be trained in a variety of interpretation techniques. Not all languages are certified, so interpreter services staff ensure that interpreters for non-certified languages have the necessary skills. The mentoring program is aimed at increasing the availability of skilled interpreters for less common languages.

See slides and handouts for additional details.