

*"The Unified Voice of Legal Services"*



September 29, 2014

Attn: Invitations to Comment  
Judicial Council  
455 Golden Gate Ave.  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
invitations@jud.ca.gov

**Re: Public Comment on Item SP14-05,  
Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts**

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of the Legal Aid Association of California (LAAC) to provide public comment to the Judicial Council as it considers the Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts (LAP), released on July 31, 2014.

Founded in 1983, LAAC is a non-profit organization created for the purpose of ensuring the effective delivery of legal services to low-income and underserved people and families throughout California. LAAC is the statewide membership organization for almost 100 legal services nonprofits in the state, and in this capacity, we frequently partner with the State Bar, the staff of the Judicial Council, and other stakeholders committed to preserving access to justice in California.

We are grateful for the multiple opportunities to help shape this plan, both through public comment periods and through our testimony at the public hearing held in San Francisco on February 24, 2014. We applaud the commitment and vision of the Working Group as it crafts a plan to fit all California courts. We also thank the Chief Justice for her leadership by continually communicating the importance of language access as part of "Access 3D."

We have joined many of our member organizations in a collaborative comment also submitted to this body. We would like to comment separately here to reiterate three key issues included in that comment: 1) there must be no unnecessary delay in creating the statewide Language Access Implementation Advisory Committee; 2) the plan must require statewide and local or regional Language Access Oversight Committees; 3) legal services representatives must have dedicated membership on all committees with implementation and monitoring roles for the LAP.

## **There must be no unnecessary delay in creating the statewide Language Access Implementation Advisory Committee**

LAAC is concerned, as stated in the collaborative comments, that there is no deadline for the creation of the Language Access Implementation Advisory Committee (LAIAC). We urge the Judicial Council to adopt a firm and immediate deadline so that no further work is delayed by the process of creating the LAIAC. The LAP has overly generous deadlines and includes in later phases many recommendations that we believe should be implemented in Phase I. In addition, even the Phase I recommendations could be unnecessarily delayed if local courts wait to act until the LAIAC is created, meets, and makes specific recommendations or requirements.

## **The LAP must require statewide and local or regional Language Access Oversight Committees**

As written, the plan requires an implementation committee, but not a committee that would oversee ongoing policies and procedures in action after the implementation plan is adopted by the LAIAC. LAAC believes that separate bodies are necessary to monitor local court procedures and make local recommendations to meet the specific needs of their constituents. Legal services organizations will be instrumental in helping to identify additional manuals, documents, and other resources for those needing interpreters to access court services. The local Language Access Oversight Committees (LAOC) should monitor the complaints received to identify larger systemic problems submitted by court users via the complaints.

## **Legal services representatives must have dedicated membership on all committees with implementation and monitoring roles for the LAP**

Having committee members who are knowledgeable about the challenges faced by low-income LEP Californians attempting to access the courts is extremely important. LAAC believes that the easiest way to ensure this is to have legal services representation on the LAIAC and statewide and local LAOCs. LAAC believes it is important to have at least two representatives so that a richer set of perspectives are represented in the committees. Additionally, legal services representatives, as shown by the collaborative comment, are extremely knowledgeable about availability of data, potential sources of additional funding, and the importance of the ultimate long-term success of the goals of this plan.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments,



Salena Copeland  
Executive Director  
Legal Aid Association of California