

Interpreters in the United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico

Staff Interpreters



Staff

The U.S. District Court for the District of Puerto Rico has seven full-time interpreters on staff



Contractors

In addition to our staff interpreters, the Court contracts with freelance interpreters when the work load exceeds the number of staff interpreters.





Contractors

Our policy is to contract only certified interpreters for Spanish<>English.

Rarely – if ever – are noncertified interpreters used for English<>Spanish. Non-certified interpreters may be contracted for Languages Other Than Spanish (LOTS).

Proceedings

Interpreters for the Court handle all criminal matters before the Court, civil matters initiated by the United States, and actions by criminal defendants instituted against the United States.



Proceedings

Criminal Proceedings include:

- ❖ Initial Appearances
- ❖ Arraignments
- ❖ Detention/Bail Hearings
- ❖ Preliminary Hearings
- ❖ Change of Plea Hearings
- ❖ Sentencing Hearings
- ❖ Evidentiary & Suppression Hearings
- ❖ Trials



Initial Appearance (IA)



During the IA the interpreter uses the simultaneous mode only, because the defendant does not address the Court.

An initial appearance is a brief proceeding to inform a defendant of the charges, his/her rights, appoint an attorney if the defendant is not hiring one, and set bail or remand to the custody of the U.S. Marshals.

Arraignment



An arraignment is a very short appearance before the Magistrate Judge for the defendant to offer a plea – generally “not guilty”.

The defendant is present with his or her attorney and answers a few general questions from the Magistrate Judge.

Arraignment

Both consecutive and simultaneous modes are used during this fast-paced exchange between the Magistrate Judge, the defendant and his/her attorney.



Detention/Bail Hearing

This proceeding is often held at the same time as the arraignment, but not always.

During a detention or bail hearing, the Magistrate Judge decides whether or not to release a defendant, and under what conditions.

Most of the interpretation during these proceedings is in the simultaneous mode.

Detention/Bail Hearing



Some of these hearings, however, may involve witnesses, in which case the role of the interpreter is similar to the role during a **trial** or some other **evidentiary hearing**.



Preliminary Hearing

A preliminary hearing, also referred to as a “preliminary examination,” is a hearing to determine whether there is probable cause to believe that an offense has been committed and that the named defendant committed the offense charged.



Preliminary Hearing



A Preliminary Hearing may involve witness testimony, so the interpreter may have to use the consecutive mode for the witness, as well as the simultaneous mode for the defendant.

Change of Plea (COP)

A defendant may decide not to go to trial and plead guilty instead. A Change of Plea Hearing is held for that purpose.



Change of Plea (COP)



There is an extensive exchange between the judge and the defendant that requires a skillful combination of *simultaneous* into the foreign language and *consecutive* into English.

Sentencing Hearing

This is a highly structured hearing in which the judge and the attorneys do most of the talking, which is interpreted in the **simultaneous** mode for the defendant.



At one point, the defendant will offer his/her allocution, which will be rendered in the **consecutive** mode.

Evidentiary & Suppression Hearings

The purpose of these hearings is precisely to present or to suppress some evidence before a trial, so they will involve witness testimony and arguments by attorneys.



Evidentiary & Suppression Hearings



Interpreters will be performing in both the consecutive and the simultaneous modes.

Trials

During trials – as with other evidentiary hearings – there will generally be one interpreter for the Court and one for the Government.

The interpreter for the Court will interpret for the defendant and all defense witnesses.

The interpreter for the Government will interpret for all prosecution witnesses.

Trials

In Puerto Rico a large majority of defendants and witnesses require an interpreter.



Team Interpreting

The preferred work arrangement for the District Court is to have two interpreters taking turns every 30-45 minutes, to prevent mental fatigue and preserve the accuracy of their renditions.

Equipment



The District Court for the District of Puerto Rico has state-of-the-art interpreting equipment installed in every courtroom.

Equipment

- Each interpreter has a headset with a microphone that picks up the sound from the courtroom's evidence presentation and public address system.
- The interpreter's microphone feeds directly into the defendant's headset or the courtroom's P.A.



TELEPHONE INTERPRETING

In addition to interpreting live in court, staff interpreters sometimes provide interpreting services over the telephone for other District Courts.



TELEPHONE INTERPRETING PROGRAM (TIP)



TIP is a nationwide effort to optimize available resources.

By providing remote interpreting to District Courts that do not have interpreters nearby, we are not only contributing to a substantial savings in costs, but are also making sure those courts get top-quality interpreting services.



- The Interpreting Profession
- Code of Ethics
- Getting Certified
- Training and Continuing Education for Judiciary Interpreters



Please see our other presentations about interpreter services in the United States District Court for the District of Puerto Rico.

Aida M. Delgado-Colón, USDJ - Chief Judge

Frances Ríos-de Morán, Esq. – Clerk of Court

Becky Agostini – Court Services Manager

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Supervisory Interpreter
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