

Rhode Island Judiciary Provides Equal Access for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (Rhode Island 2016)

In April 2016, the Rhode Island Justice Department announced the closure of its case concerning the provision of language assistance to individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) in the state court system following the successful implementation of reforms by the Rhode Island Judiciary.

The Rhode Island Judiciary and the Justice Department resolved an investigation of an administrative complaint filed under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in federally funded programs or activities. The complaint alleged that the Rhode Island Judiciary failed to provide interpreters and other language assistance services to LEP court users. In 2012, following extensive negotiations between the Rhode Island Judiciary and the department, Chief Justice Paul A. Suttell of the Rhode Island Supreme Court issued Executive Order No. 2012-05 on language services in the courts to mandate that qualified interpreters and other approved language assistance be provided at no charge for individuals with LEP in all court proceedings, services and programs.

In 2014, the department approved the Rhode Island Judiciary's language access plan and the parties signed a voluntary resolution agreement that required the successful implementation of the executive order and plan, continued input from a stakeholder committee, compliance with Title VI and two years of monitoring and technical assistance. In April 2016, after the Rhode Island Judiciary completed the conditions for termination of the agreement, the department officially closed the case.

In addition to adopting the comprehensive language access policy contained in the executive order, the department and the Rhode Island Judiciary have done the following to improve how the courts communicate with LEP court users:

- Designating staff qualified to provide services to court customers in languages other than English;
- Posting signage in six languages throughout each court house advising the public of the right to an interpreter at no cost;
- Requiring both parties to state court actions to report interpreter needs data to the court through new e-filing requirements;
- Translating forms and website content into commonly spoken languages in Rhode Island, such as Spanish, Portuguese, Khmer and Cape Verdean;
- Creating a multilingual notice of right to language assistance and adopting a court rule requiring service of the notice upon each defendant in a proceeding;
- And, creating a language services complaint policy and posting a complaint form in multiple languages on the court's website, in court clerk's offices and in the Office of Court Interpreters

For more information visit: [Justice Department Closes Case after Rhode Island Judiciary Reforms Provide Equal Access for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency](#)

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