



Interpreters make sure that everyone involved in a court proceeding can understand each other and what is happening.

Spoken language interpreters

Spoken language interpreters translate everything the judge, lawyers, witnesses and others say during a court proceeding into the language of the person they are helping. When that person speaks in their own language, the interpreter translates whatever they say into English.

Usually, the interpreter will sit beside the person to listen and interpret either by whispering while a speaker speaks, or by translating a sentence or two aloud when the speaker pauses. Sometimes they will use a microphone and headset.

Under the *Criminal Code*, an accused can apply to have their trial or preliminary inquiry in French or both French and English. If an order for a French or bilingual trial or preliminary inquiry is made, the interpreter would translate everything into French or both French and English.

[French language criminal and traffic trials](#)

Visual language interpreters

American Sign Language (ASL) is used to interpret for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and understand and use sign language. The interpreter will sit or stand where the person can see them and interpret everything said in the courtroom.

Individuals who do not use or understand visual sign language can request Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART). With CART, someone creates a written record of what is being said in court as it is said, and it appears on a computer monitor for the person to read (like closed captioning on a television).

When the Court Services Branch provides interpreters

Court Services Branch is responsible for courthouse operations. It provides free spoken-language interpreters for witnesses and participants who do not speak English in these types of court proceedings:

- Criminal adult and youth cases
- Family cases
- Traffic, ticket, bylaw cases

Court Services Branch also provides free visual language interpretation for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Asking for an interpreter

If you have a lawyer, you can tell them if you or your witness needs an interpreter. The lawyer will make the arrangements.

If you do not have a lawyer and you or your witness needs an interpreter, you need to ask your local court registry to arrange for one when you file your application in family, traffic, ticket or municipal bylaw proceedings. When you are setting a date for a trial or hearing, you can also tell a judge or judicial case manager that you will need an interpreter.

It is important to let the court registry know as soon as possible that an interpreter is needed. If they cannot arrange an interpreter in time, the case may have to be rescheduled.

If an interpreter has been requested but will not be needed, it is also important to tell the court registry as soon as possible.

If you are a self-represented accused in a criminal trial and need an interpreter, you can tell Crown counsel. If you are a witness in a criminal trial, you can tell the Crown counsel or defence lawyer who is calling you as a witness that you need an interpreter. The lawyer will make the arrangements.

[Court registry contact information \(Government of BC\)](#)

Interpreters are only provided for court hearings

An interpreter provided by Court Services Branch will help during the court hearing to interpret anything said. However, you must find your own interpreter for most things that go on outside the court hearing. For example, you must find your own interpreter if you need an interpreter

to help:

- Talk with court staff
- Fill out an application for a court order
- Meet with a lawyer

The Family Justice Services Division of the Ministry of the Attorney General may provide an interpreter for meetings with a Family Justice Counsellor or other meetings arranged through a Family Justice Centre or a Justice Access Centre.

[Family Justice Centres and Justice Access Centres \(Government of BC\)](#)

Professional interpreters for small claims cases

Court Services Branch does not provide interpreters for small claims cases.

A judge may allow a family member or friend to help you in settlement conferences, as long as they will not be a witness, are not involved in the dispute and their presence will not be disruptive.

However, you must hire a professional interpreter for a small claims trial. Professional court interpreting takes special skills, including knowledge of legal terms and the ability to choose words that match the speaker's language level and tone. Interpreters must swear an oath or affirm that they will truly and correctly interpret the evidence and proceedings in court to the best of their skills and ability. Family members and friends do not have the necessary skills or objectivity to do that in a trial.

Court registries are not able to recommend interpreters, although they may be able to show you a list of professional interpreters working in your area.

You may be able to get help finding a professional interpreter from:

[Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia](#)

[Mosaic BC](#)

[Immigration Interpreters Association](#)

[DIVERSEcity](#)

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