

Requesting a Court Interpreter

A court interpreter is an impartial “language conduit” whose participation allows an individual who does not speak or understand English or is limited in English proficiency to participate meaningfully in a judicial proceeding. The interpreter has a two-fold duty:

1. to ensure that the proceedings in English reflect precisely what was said to and by a non-English-speaking person; and
2. to place the non-English-speaking person on an equal footing with those who understand spoken English

Your request for an interpreter will not in any way affect the outcome of the proceedings.

- If you need an interpreter, it is very important that the court is aware of that need BEFORE the trial. Failure to alert the court prior to your appearance can cause unnecessary delays.
- If you have an attorney, notify him or her of your need and ensure that he or she notifies the court. Some may incorrectly think that your ability speak basic English in your pre-trial discussions means that you will understand the entirety of the court proceedings.
- If you do not have an attorney, notify the trial court assistant or court clerk of your interpreter need when scheduling your court appearance. If you are unable to communicate that need, you may point to the following paragraph:

I understand that I am entitled to a certified court interpreter for my court proceedings. Please contact Court Interpreter Services to schedule an interpreter for the day of my court appearance.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: If I don't understand English, what should I do?

A: Request the services of an interpreter either via your attorney or by notifying the court when scheduling your court date.

Q: Can I talk about my case or ask questions directly to my interpreter?

No, the interpreter's job is solely to transmit the legal proceeding.

Q: I am unable to pay for an interpreter for my court appearance. What should I do?

A: You may still request an interpreter for your court proceedings. One will be provided free of charge.

Q: I brought my bilingual family member or friend with me to court. Can he or she interpret for me?

A: Though family or friends are welcome to help you outside of the courtroom in minor tasks such as contacting the court clerk's office, they are not allowed to interpret in court proceedings. Court interpretation requires a very high language level in both English and the foreign language in addition to specific training.

Q: Can I trust the interpreter not to repeat what he/she has heard?

A: Yes. Interpreters are ethically required to maintain complete confidentiality.

For further information:

Visit the courts' foreign language page at <http://courts.arkansas.gov/>

Court Interpreter Services
Administrative Office of the Courts
625 Marshall St.
Little Rock, AR 72201
Phone: 501-682-9400

English English

Welcome to the Arkansas Courts

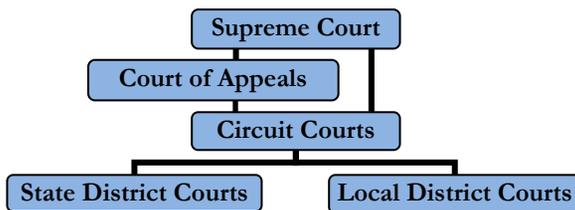


**Administrative Office of the Courts
Court Interpreter Services**

The Arkansas Courts

The courts of the state of Arkansas are an independent branch of government responsible for the fair and just resolution of disputes in order to protect the rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution and laws of the United States and of Arkansas.

There are several levels of state courts in Arkansas. The highest court is the Arkansas Supreme Court. Cases can typically only reach the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals after being heard first in a lower court. Circuit courts hear cases in five different subject-matter divisions: criminal, civil, probate, domestic relations, and juvenile. District courts are divided into two types, state and local, but both hear minor civil and criminal cases, as well as small claims cases. Examples of types of cases in each division can be found below.



- **Criminal:** Theft, Assault
- **Civil:** Contracts, Personal Injury
- **Probate:** Wills, Guardianships
- **Domestic Relations:** Divorce, Child Support
- **Juvenile:** Delinquency, Neglect
- **Small Claims:** Seeking Damages under \$5,000

***Remember that state courts are separate from federal courts, even if the federal court is located in Arkansas.**

Important Terms

If you prefer to speak a language other than English, please request a qualified court interpreter for your proceeding. This glossary is provided to assist you in understanding some key court terms, but it is not intended to serve as an official reference nor as legal advice.

Bench Trial (*Bench Trial*)- A trial where the judge makes the final decision, as opposed to a jury trial.

Bail (*Bail*)- Money an accused person leaves with the court in order to be released from jail until the trial.

Court Clerk (*Court Clerk*)- The person responsible for record keeping in the court. Most paperwork goes through the clerk's office.

Deposition (*Deposition*)- Testimony taken under oath in preparation for a trial.

Defendant (*Defendant*)- The person against whom an action is brought in court.

Felony (*Felony*)- A serious criminal offense punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine.

Jury (*Jury*)- An impartial group of community members selected to hear evidence and deliver a decision.

Depending on the case type, you may have a right to a jury trial.

Misdemeanor (*Misdemeanor*)- Offenses less serious than felonies; generally punishable by a fine or short term imprisonment.

Plaintiff (*Plaintiff*)- The person who brings an action to the court against the defendant.

Plea Bargain (*Plea Bargain*)- An agreement between the prosecutor and the defense resolving a case with a guilty plea, generally in exchange for a diminished sentence, probation, and/or a fine.

Probation (*Probation*)- allows a person convicted of an offense to remain free on condition of good behavior and generally under the supervision of a probation officer together with other restrictions as the court may impose.

Prosecutor (*Prosecutor*)- The attorney who represents the state in criminal matters.

Summons (*Summons*)- A notice informing a defendant that a case has been filed against him or her and requiring a response at a specific place and time.

Subpoena (*Subpoena*)- A court order requiring a person to appear in court to give testimony.

Preparing for Court

- DO ensure that you have requested an interpreter if you or your attorney have any doubt about your ability to understand very high level English
- DO arrive plenty of time in advance
- DO dress neatly and respectfully
- DO turn off your cell phone and any other electronic devices prior to entering the courtroom
- DO ensure that you or your attorney have all of the papers that have been filed or served, as well as any other necessary documents
- DO address the judge with respect, referring to him or her as "your honor"
- DO speak clearly and loudly to ensure understanding by the judge and/or interpreter
- DON'T pretend to understand something. The interpreter interprets exactly what is said, and if a point does not come across clearly to you in your language, you may ask the speaker for clarification.