

LEGAL SERVICES OF SOUTH CENTRAL MICHIGAN

EQUAL ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATION POLICY

Policy:

Legal Services of South Central Michigan (LSSCM), its employees, contractors, and agents shall provide reasonable accommodations to all people seeking assistance from LSSCM to ensure equal access to our services.

Reasonable accommodations include the use of internal and external resources available to ensure the client is afforded equal access.

Equal access means that any significant impediment that prevents a prospective client from accessing LSSCM's services will be identified and accommodated in a respectful manner and without undue delay; that the client's confidentiality will be maintained; and that the services provided will be equal to the high standard normally provided any and all LSSCM clients.

Procedures for clients:

1. At the first contact with a prospective client, an assessment of any potential impediment to LSSCM's ability to render equal access to its services shall be identified and noted in the client's application for service or client file.
2. If a client is identified as a person of "limited English proficiency" (LEP), or if the person appears uncomfortable speaking in English, the intake staff will attempt to transfer the person to an employee of LSSCM who is able to converse in the person's preferred language. If no LSSCM employee conversant in the client's language is available, then interpretive services outside of LSSCM will be utilized. Such services may be either a telephone language translation service, a competent translator obtained through a community agency, or a private translation service. The procedures for assessing language needs and contacting translation resources are attached in Ex. A.
3. Some clients may wish to use family members as interpreters. If this is the client's preference, this preference should normally be respected and should be documented in the file. Absent this client preference, the use of a Client's family member or friend for interpretation services should not be encouraged by LSSCM staff; If there is any reason to believe the client's case is being compromised by the use of a family member or friend serving as an interpreter, an independent interpreter should be provided for all communications with the client for the benefit of the client and the casehandler.

4. Written documents and papers relevant to a client's matter shall be read to the client when feasible and shall be translated into the client's primary language when imperative to the client's appropriate participation in her matter.

5. Hearing impaired clients are to be offered telephone translation services (TTY) or a sign language interpreter, as the client prefers. Visually impaired clients are to be offered conversion of all documents and papers.

Procedures for the community:

When there are significant numbers of potential clients who are identified as being members of a single Limited English Proficient group within our service area, notices shall be posted in the reception areas of the offices, and in any relevant media advertising, in the language of the identified LEP group, advising the public of the availability of no cost interpretive services in the identified language(s).

When there are significant numbers of potential clients who are identified as being members of a single Limited English Proficient group within our service area, standard outreach brochures and CLE informational pamphlets shall be translated into the language of the identified LEP group and made readily available to members of the identified linguistic group through appropriate community resources.

Training and Evaluation

LSSCM will periodically conduct an assessment of LEP needs within its service area. Such assessment will include review of census data, solicitation of input on LEP issues in priorities and client needs surveys/discussions, and communication with other regional and local service providers. LSSCM will provide orientation and regular training to all staff who interact with eligible individuals on this policy and other procedures related to serving clients with LEP issues. Oversight and evaluation of these procedures will be the responsibility of the management group.