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*Executive Office of Health and Human Services*  
**Department of Transitional Assistance**  
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**Operations Memo 2013-11**  
**March 19, 2013**

**To:** Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

**From:**  Stephanie Brown, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations

**Re:** Department Interpreter Services Procedures

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**Overview**

To comply with federal law, the Department must advise applicants and clients (hereafter referred to as clients) of the right to professional interpreter services regardless of language, national origin or noncitizen status and must provide interpreter services to clients whose primary language is not English. **Interpreter services must be provided to clients with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) at the first point of contact.**

Clients with LEP must not be turned away or told to return with an interpreter. A client who presents either in person or by telephone with an adult intending to act as an interpreter must be advised that DTA will provide a professional interpreter free of charge. After being informed, the client may decline the use of professional interpreter services and choose to have the adult serve as an interpreter.

**Important:** Children over age 12 may interpret only to schedule an appointment. Children age 12 and under must not be asked to interpret for any purpose.

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**Purpose of Memo**

This Operations Memo informs TAO and Central Office staff about Interpreter Services procedures.

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**Department  
Interpreter  
Services**

The Department has three means of assisting clients with professional interpreter services at the TAO, the primary point of interaction for most clients:

- bilingual case managers;
- Human Services Assistants (HSAs); and
- telephonic and contracted in-person language interpreter services.

Central Office units that interact with clients primarily rely upon bilingual staff and telephonic language interpreters.

*Bilingual Case  
Managers and  
Human Services  
Assistants*

Bilingual case managers are located in many TAOs. The Department also employs HSAs who act as interpreters for the following high incidence languages: Cape Verdean Creole, Chinese, Khmer, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. Each HSA is affiliated with a specific TAO. The HSA list is located on the DTA Online Intranet site. To access the list:

- click Administration & Finance;
- select Interpreter Services under Administrative Operations; and
- select TAO Interpreter List under Interpreter Services.

Case managers may also visit the Department's Interpreter Services intranet page on Policy Online.

*In-Person  
Interpreter  
Services*

Contracted organizations provide in-person statewide interpreter services. However, as there is an up to 72-hour wait time for providing contracted interpreters, these services should be used for scheduled face-to-face appointments and not relied upon to meet immediate needs.

*Telephonic  
Interpreter  
Services*

For in-person or telephonic communications with clients, bilingual case managers and HSAs must be used, if available. Telephonic language interpreters should be accessed whenever a bilingual case manager or an HSA is unavailable to assist an unscheduled walk-in client or telephone contact. All TAO staff have direct access to telephonic language interpreters. Supervisory sign-off is not required to access telephonic interpreter services.

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**Guidelines for  
Providing  
Interpreter  
Services**

Clients with LEP must not be turned away or told to return with an interpreter. Professional interpreters are offered free of charge to all clients with LEP in order to conduct Department business.

A client who presents either in person or by telephone with an adult intending to act as an interpreter must be advised that the Department will provide a professional interpreter free of charge. The client may decline the use of professional interpreter services and choose to have the adult serve as an interpreter.

**Note:** If the client declines the use of professional interpreter services, the case manager must annotate the Narrative tab “Client declined professional interpreter services.”

**Important:** Children over age 12 may interpret only to schedule appointments. Children age 12 and under may not be asked to interpret for any purpose.

A client who speaks some English or appears to understand English may not have the language skills needed to fully comprehend what Department staff are communicating or the Department’s written materials. If a case manager finds that a professional interpreter is needed at any point in the interaction with the client, arrange for interpreter services.

**Important:** There are no "magic words" a client must say to request an interpreter.

**Example 1:**

Vladimir Rabinowicz comes to the office to apply for benefits. The front desk clerk observes that he does not seem to understand simple questions being asked of him, such as “What is your address?” The clerk should provide Mr. Rabinowicz with the “I speak” card and notify the case manager of the need for an interpreter.

**Example 2:**

Maria Valdez is a native Spanish speaker. She tells her case manager that her community health center provides her with an interpreter, but does not directly ask for a Department interpreter. This should be treated as an interpreter request. The case manager should stop the interaction until in-person or telephonic interpreter assistance can be secured.

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**Guidelines for  
Providing  
Interpreter  
Services  
(continued)**

A client has the right to refuse the use of a *specific* bilingual case manager, HSA or contracted in-person interpreter. Department staff must not inquire as to the reason for refusal. In this situation, a telephonic interpreter must be engaged to provide interpretation for the client.

**Note:** If the client declines the use of a bilingual case manager, HSA or in-person interpreter the case manager should annotate the Narrative tab “Client declined interpreter services.”

If a contracted interpreter from an outside service does not appear for a scheduled in-person interview, immediately access a telephonic interpreter to conduct the interview. Do not reschedule the interview in this situation.

Clients must be allowed to complete Department business on the date of first contact, if time permits. Otherwise, a follow-up appointment must be scheduled using the interpreter to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. Clients retain all rights based on their initial application dates.

**Important:** Application and recertification materials, including Rights and Responsibilities, must be orally interpreted when the materials are not available in the language that the person can read.

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**TAO  
Receptionist  
Responsibilities  
for Walk-In  
Clients**

The TAO receptionist is the first point of contact for walk-in clients and will have an initial role in helping to assess interpreter needs. If a client requests an interpreter or cannot communicate effectively in English, the TAO receptionist must:

- refer the client to the *Do You Need an Interpreter?* poster or page of the LEP Services Binder (available at every TAO) so the client can indicate the language he or she speaks;

**Note:** For clients who have difficulty reading, the receptionist must access a telephonic interpreter to ascertain the language spoken and reason for TAO visit. To access a telephonic interpreter, see instructions found later in this memo.

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**TAO  
Receptionist  
Responsibilities  
for Walk-In  
Clients  
(continued)**

- provide the *Things to Know While Waiting for an Interpreter* instructions in the LEP Services Binder to clients in the appropriate language;
  - give the client the appropriate version of the *Your Right to Interpreter Services* brochure if he or she speaks one of the following languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Khmer, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, Russian or Portuguese;
  - determine the reason for the visit to the TAO by communicating with the client, adult intending to act as interpreter, bilingual case manager, HSA or by accessing a telephonic interpreter; and
  - record the client's name, the language requested and assign the client to the next available case manager following the TAO's established procedures. Inform the case manager that a client with LEP is waiting.
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**Case Manager  
Responsibilities  
for Providing  
Interpreter  
Services to  
Walk-In Clients**

By the time the client is referred to the case manager, in most instances, the need for interpreter services has been identified. If the case manager discovers that the client needs interpreter services during the course of the conversation the procedures below must be followed:

For any walk-in client, the case manager must secure an interpreter based on the client request or need as follows:

- a bilingual case manager or HSA must be used, if available;

**Note:** An HSA in another TAO may be contacted to act as a telephonic interpreter; or

- a telephonic interpreter must be accessed.

Once an interpreter has been secured, in person or by telephone, for a new applicant, the case manager must:

- give the walk-in applicant the *I Speak* card (FSP-LC Rev. 2/91); or
- record the telephone applicant's language on the *I Speak* card by using the interpreter to communicate information about the card.

**Important:** Application and recertification materials including Rights and Responsibilities must be orally interpreted when the materials are not available in the language that the person can read.

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**Case Manager Responsibilities for Providing Interpreter Services for Scheduled Client Appointments**

For clients with scheduled in-person appointments, the case manager must secure an HSA or statewide contracted interpreter prior to the date of the scheduled appointment by accessing DTA Online. In DTA Online, select:

- Administration and Finance;
- select Interpreter Services (under Administrative Operations); and
- select *Interpreter Request Form*.

Enter information on the form and save it as a Word file. (The Interpreter Request Form is also available in the Interpreter Services and the Online Forms option of Policy Online.)

Email the saved form at least 3 working days in advance, if possible, to the individuals named at the bottom of the *Interpreter Request Form*. Be sure to send a copy of this email to the TAO director or designee.

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**Case Manager Responsibilities for Providing Interpreter Services for Scheduled Telephonic Appointments**

Prior to a scheduled telephonic appointment with a client, the case manager must either secure an HSA using the instructions above, or use a telephonic interpreter. If a client telephones the case manager to ask a question or request case information, the three-way calling functionality should be used to connect the case manager, the client and the telephonic interpreter.

For a client who presents either in person or by telephone with an adult intending to act as an interpreter, the case manager must offer professional interpreter services free of charge. The client may decline the use of professional interpreter services and choose to have the adult serve as an interpreter. In this situation, the case manager must enter the following on the Narrative tab: "Client declined professional interpreter services."

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**TAO Staff and Switchboard Responsibilities**

**TAO Staff Responsibilities for Mail-In, Fax or Web Clients**

The appropriate TAO staff person must review all mail-in, fax and web applications to determine if an interpreter has been requested. A client requesting interpreter services must be assigned to a bilingual case manager if possible, or assigned a case manager who is informed that an interpreter will be needed.

**TAO Switchboard Responsibilities for Telephone Clients**

When a client telephones the TAO and it is determined that interpreter services are needed, the clerk at the switchboard must access a telephonic interpreter to determine the reason for the call. Once sufficient information has been obtained, the clerk shall forward the call to the appropriate TAO staff. The telephonic interpreter can also assist DTA staff in determining the language spoken, if unknown at point of initial contact.

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**TAO Director or Designee Responsibilities**

The TAO director or designee must ensure that the *Do You Need an Interpreter?* poster is prominently displayed in the reception area of the office and that the LEP Services Binder is readily available to reception staff.

The director or designee must also ensure that TAO staff is familiar with three-way calling procedures available in each TAO, as well as how to access in-person telephonic interpreters and other interpreter services.

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**Interpreter Usage Tracking Reports**

The TAO director or designee should track interpreter requests using the *Interpreter Request Forms* submitted by their case managers. They should also review telelanguage line reports and contracted interpreter service reports periodically forwarded from Central Office.

These reports will also be forwarded periodically to relevant Central Office unit managers for their review and analysis.

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**Central Office Responsibilities**

**Responsibilities for Clients seen in Central Office**

Clients who arrive at Central Office report to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) reception area. EOHHS staff will contact the appropriate member of the DTA administrative staff, who, if necessary, will determine the language of the client by using the LEP Services Binder. The DTA administrative staff person will meet with the client in an interview room. If there is a need for an interpreter, the DTA staff person will contact Recipient Services or the SNAP Web Unit, as appropriate. The staff member assigned to the client may work with other staff who are qualified as interpreters in the appropriate language, or may use the telephonic interpreter service. DTA staff must schedule appropriate interpreter services if it is known that a client with LEP is coming to a scheduled meeting or a fair hearing.

**Responsibilities for Client-Initiated Telephone Calls**

When a client telephones a Central Office business unit, including, but not limited to, the Commissioner's Office, the Recipient Services Unit, the Centralized SNAP Web Unit, the Division of Hearings, the Recoveries and Reimbursement Unit, or the Administrative Support Unit Manager and it is determined that interpreter services are needed, a telephonic interpreter must be accessed to conduct Department business with the client if a bilingual staff member is unavailable.

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**Three-Way  
Calling  
Functionality**

All DTA telephone systems have three-way calling capability (also known as conference calling). Instructions for placing a three-way call are available in the “Getting a Telephone Interpreter” job aid on Policy Online (see below). The three-way calling functionality must be used when a client needing interpreter services calls DTA and a telephonic interpreter must be connected.

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**Accessing  
Telephonic  
Interpreters**

Instructions for accessing the Department’s contracted telephone interpreter are found in the “Getting a Telephone Interpreter” job aid. The direct link is: [http://dtaonline/training/tr\\_online/jobaides/getting%20a%20telephone%20interpreter%20job%20aid.pdf](http://dtaonline/training/tr_online/jobaides/getting%20a%20telephone%20interpreter%20job%20aid.pdf)

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**Resources**

The Department has created an Interpreter Services page on its intranet site. Interpreter services procedures, LEP binder materials, interpreter request form, Human Services Assistants office listing, “Getting a Telephone Interpreter” job aid and other resources can be found on this page.

To access the page, go to Policy Online and select the “Interpreter Services” caret. The direct link is:

<http://dtaonline/refrence/curpol/interpreter%20info/interpreter%20info%20page.html>

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**Training**

All new BERS and clerical staff receive training on interpreter services procedures. In addition, staff who participate in the Department’s customer service training are trained on these procedures.

TAO managers are reminded that training is available upon request by emailing the Training Unit mailbox.

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**Policy  
References**

TAFDC and EAEDC – 106 CMR 701.360.  
SNAP – 106 CMR 360.510.

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**Obsolete  
Material**

Field Operations Memo 2008-16 is now obsolete.

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**Questions**

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.

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