



## Your Right to an Interpreter

### WHEN DO I HAVE A RIGHT TO AN INTERPRETER?

**You have the right to an interpreter if you need one to understand what is going on.**

Agencies which get state or federal funds must provide a free interpreter to people with limited English skills. This includes most government offices, schools, courts, hospitals, police and fire departments, and non-profits.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO TO GET AN INTERPRETER?

- Ask for one. You can say: **“I need a \_\_\_\_\_ interpreter.”**  
*Fill in the blank with your language*
- If the agency refuses, tell them that the law says they must provide an interpreter. **Show them the English version of this Fact Sheet.**

### HOW LONG SHOULD I WAIT FOR AN INTERPRETER?

Getting an interpreter should not take so long that you lose a benefit or miss a deadline. Keep track of how long it takes to get an interpreter.

### WHO PAYS FOR THE INTERPRETER?

The agency where you are seeking help has to pay for the interpreter.



### WHAT IF THE AGENCY TELLS ME TO BRING MY OWN INTERPRETER?

It is illegal for an agency to ask you to bring an interpreter.

- Ask for an interpreter. If they do not give you one, complain in writing. Keep a copy.
- You can bring your own interpreter, if you want. But, an agency may choose to use its own interpreter.
- Children / minors must not be used to interpret.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE INTERPRETER?

You have the right to an interpreter you can understand.

- If you do not understand the interpreter, ask the interpreter to explain or repeat what was said. Do not be afraid to ask questions.
- If you cannot understand, tell the agency.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN INTERPRETER?

The role of an interpreter is to tell you in your language what is being said. **The interpreter is not an advocate.** They do not help you with the problem, they only help you communicate. The interpreter must be neutral and fair. The interpreter should keep your information private.

## WHAT IF MY INTERPRETER DID NOT DO WHAT THEY SHOULD HAVE?

Complain in writing to the agency. If you need help, call Legal Aid.

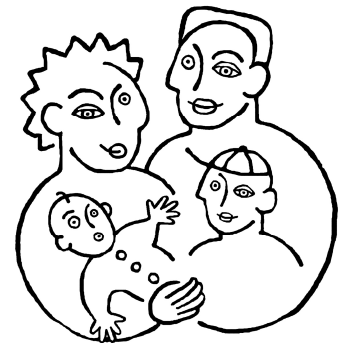
## WHAT ABOUT TRANSLATED MATERIALS?

An agency must translate important documents free of charge in a timely way. This includes notices, applications, and other important written materials.

## WHY DO I HAVE A RIGHT TO AN INTERPRETER?

Language discrimination is national origin discrimination. It is discrimination based on what country you came from.

- The right to an interpreter is a **CIVIL RIGHT**.
- If a federally funded agency does not provide an interpreter, this can be national origin discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Agencies in Minnesota must provide an interpreter under the Minnesota Human Rights Act.



## WHAT DO I DO IF AN INTERPRETER IS NOT PROVIDED OR IF THE AGENCY TELLS ME TO BRING MY OWN INTERPRETER?

- Get the name and business card of the person / agency who denied your rights.
- Speak with the supervisor.
- Write a letter to complain to:
  - The agency's director or civil rights unit
  - Minnesota Department of Human Rights; and
  - The federal agency funding the agency or the U.S. Department of Justice.
- Write a letter to the Mayor, the Governor, your Congresspersons, your State or local representatives.
- Write down who you talked to and when. Keep copies of your letters.

**In Hennepin County, call the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis: (612) 334-5970**

To find other Legal Aid Society materials, including the fact sheets mentioned in this document, go to [www.lawhelpmn.org/LASMfactsheets](http://www.lawhelpmn.org/LASMfactsheets).

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*Minneapolis Legal Aid Society- CLE*  
*Minnesota Legal Services Coalition*  
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*St. Paul, MN 55114*

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*Write us for updates, a fact sheet list, or alternate formats.*  
*Fact Sheets aren't a complete answer to a legal problem.*  
*See a lawyer for advice.*