



Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors

Subcommittee Report

INTERNAL OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

9.

Meeting Date: 12/09/2019

Subject: Policy Regarding Policy Regarding Language Interpretation Services at Board of Supervisors Meetings

Submitted For: David Twa, County Administrator

Department: County Administrator

Referral No.: IOC 19/13

Referral Name: Policy Regarding Language Interpretation Services at Board of Supervisors Meetings

Presenter: Jami Napier, Chief Asst Clerk of the Board **Contact:** Jami Napier, 925-335-1908

Referral History:

Currently, there is no formal procedure or process for providing language interpretation services at the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors meetings. If a member of the public speaks at public comment and they are more comfortable speaking a language other than English, they historically have brought a language interpreter with them for assistance. Upon approaching the podium to address the Board of Supervisors, the Clerk doubles the speaker's time in order to allow both the speaker, in his/her preferred language, and the English interpreter to address the Board of Supervisors. This method of interpretation is referred to as "consecutive interpretation".

Several County departments utilize language translation and interpretation services from one vendor, LanguageLine. For example, the Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) has a contract for up to \$1,250,000 to provide telephone interpretation, on-site interpretation, and document translation services. Additionally, other County departments, including the Conservation and Development, District Attorney, Health Services, and the Clerk-Recorder/Elections Departments also use language interpretation services from LanguageLine.

To better serve the residents of Contra Costa County and encourage public participation in Board meetings, the Chair of the Board of Supervisors requested a study and report on language accommodations for Board of Supervisors meetings in the other Bay Area counties.

In September 2019, the Internal Operations Committee accepted a staff report on the prospect of providing language interpretation services at the Board of Supervisors meetings. The committee acknowledged that the services could not be implemented until staff relocates to the new Administration Building. In the meantime, the committee directed staff to conduct further research on the options that would be available and report back to the committee. The direction given to staff was to determine:

- More information about the County’s experience with its current vendor, LanguageLine, including:
 - Whether the County would need to pay a retainer for services;
 - The County Employment and Human Services Division (EHSD)’s experience with LanguageLine;
 - The different methods of providing services – telephone, in-person, etc; and
- Alternatives to using the current vendor, including renting or buying multichannel translation equipment.

Staff was also directed to obtain additional information from cities within Contra Costa County, specifically Richmond, Concord and San Ramon. And, finally staff was directed to identify next steps to prepare or draft a bid for services.

Referral Update:

County’s Experience with LanguageLine

The County’s LanguageLine representative spoke in length with staff regarding the County’s current services and how best to incorporate the Board of Supervisors meetings. LanguageLine confirmed there would be no retainer for services. The Clerk of the Board of Supervisors would be invoiced only for services used. A new contract would not be required; LanguageLine will agree to add an addendum to address the Board of Supervisors meeting requirements. The terms and conditions would mirror the agreement the County has with EHSD. In addition to EHSD, the County departments of Conservation and Development, Clerk-Recorder/Elections and the District Attorney also use LanguageLine services.

Currently, County departments use a full suite of LanguageLine services: telephone, video, in-person and written services. The major Contra Costa County customer is the Medi-Cal / CalFresh call center, with EHSD face-to-face services at field offices being the second highest user of language access services. Video interpreting services are also used via an iPad at County offices. Like Skype services, video interpreting is an excellent way to provide American Sign Language (ASL) services. Contra Costa County uses the full contracted amount of funds from the LanguageLine contract annually. There is a 2-hour minimum for on-site services and the interpreter also gets reimbursed for gas mileage.

Recall from our September report the LanguageLine costs for In-Person, On-Site Interpretation, with a two hour minimum for on-site services, and for Written Materials Translation with a \$60 minimum:

<u>Language Line On-Site Service Prices</u>	
Tier 1 – Spanish	\$60/hour
Tier 2 – Standard Languages	\$60/hour
Tier 3 – American Sign Language	\$70/hour
Tier 4 – Rare Languages	\$80/hour

<u>Language Line Written Materials Prices</u>	
Spanish	\$.19/word
Cantonese & Mandarin	\$.24/word
Tagalog	\$.25/word

As examples, (1) a Board of Supervisors meeting agenda is on average 26 pages; there are approximately 300 words per page for an agenda; the cost for a Spanish translation of a 7,800 words is \$1,482.00; and (2) a discussion item board report can be from one to one-hundred pages long with 400-500 words on a page; a ten-page board report with 400 words on a page would cost \$960.00 to translate.

Purchasing or Renting Multichannel Translation Equipment

Another option would be to purchase a translation system. Contra Costa County can purchase a multichannel translation system with an interpreter model. Headsets are included, with the average of 10 headsets per system. Systems range in cost from a \$1,000 to \$25,000 depending upon the brand, number of simultaneous languages, and number of receivers. Renting headsets may not cost-effective, and would require contracting with a vendor each time services are needed.

City Experience Providing Translation Services

Staff contacted the City Clerk departments of Richmond, Concord and San Ramon. The Senior Assistant City Attorney and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator for Richmond said the City doesn't have a policy in place but is working on an Equal Access Ordinance. It is unclear if the ordinance will address language interpretation at council meetings or if it is more general. Currently, Richmond has the same practice as Contra Costa County where they double the time allowed for public comment when a non-speaker of English approaches the council in order to allow for time to translate to English.

The City of San Ramon Deputy Clerk stated that they do not staff formal interpreters or translators at their City Council meetings.

The City of Concord City Clerk said that while they have no formal policy, but they provide services as needed. Concord has a relationship with Monument Impact, a community-based nonprofit dedicated to "building skills, resources and power within immigrant, refugee and low-income communities in Concord". When there is an item on the City of Concord agenda that may have numerous of Spanish-speaking public in attendance, the City of Concord hires an interpreter and borrows headsets from Monument Impact. The interpreter stands in the back of the Council Chambers and provides simultaneous interpretation to those members of the public that are wearing headsets. While this is not a formal policy, the relationship the City Clerk has with Monument Impact is a benefit to the public for their City Council meetings.

As reported last September, the Chief Assistant Clerk of the Board conducted a survey of Bay Area counties and received responses from four local counties: Alameda, Marin, Santa Clara, and Solano. The four responding counties request a 72-hour advance notice for language interpretation services from individuals planning to attend a Board of Supervisors meeting. All four counties currently provide language accommodations in varying degrees, as summarized below.

Contracts with Neighboring Counties: Overview and Administration

The costs for services will vary with the breadth of the contract. Costs tend to be on an hourly or as-needed basis. Among the counties surveyed, there is a consensus that in person interpretation services have a two-hour minimum time length. All counties evaluated, with the exception of Santa Clara, have limited experience with translation services.

- **Alameda County** Clerk of the Board, through administration, has contracts with two vendors and provides services in both American Sign Language and Spanish upon a 72-hour advance request.
- **Marin County** Clerk of the Board has one contract through their administration office and can provide translation services in both Spanish and other languages, also with a 72-hour advance request.
- **Santa Clara County** Clerk of the Board through their executive office has multiples contracts with translation vendors. The Clerk of the Board uses Mandarin, Spanish and other language translators.
- **Solano County** Clerk of the Board reports that they do not have a contract to provide language translation services, but citizens can request a Spanish translator with a 72-hour advance request.

Recommendation(s)/Next Step(s):

1. ACCEPT report update on further study of potential services and exploration of policies or procedures in Contra Costa cities.
2. DETERMINE whether there is enough information to direct staff to draft a policy or bid related to interpretation services, or if more research required.

Fiscal Impact (if any):

Unknown fiscal impact.

Attachments

No file(s) attached.
