

Public Law 95-539
95th Congress

An Act

Oct. 28, 1978
[S. 1315]

To provide more effectively for the use of interpreters in courts of the United States, and for other purposes.

Court
Interpreters Act.
28 USC 1 note.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Court Interpreters Act".

SEC. 2. (a) Chapter 119 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end thereof the following new sections:

28 USC 1827.

“§ 1827. Interpreters in courts of the United States

“(a) The Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts shall establish a program to facilitate the use of interpreters in courts of the United States.

Annual report.

“(b) The Director shall prescribe, determine, and certify the qualifications of persons who may serve as certified interpreters in courts of the United States in bilingual proceedings and proceedings involving the hearing impaired (whether or not also speech impaired), and in so doing, the Director shall consider the education, training, and experience of those persons. The Director shall maintain a current master list of all interpreters certified by the Director and shall report annually on the frequency of requests for, and the use and effectiveness of, interpreters. The Director shall prescribe a schedule of fees for services rendered by interpreters.

Fee schedule.

“(c) Each United States district court shall maintain on file in the office of the clerk of court a list of all persons who have been certified as interpreters, including bilingual interpreters and oral or manual interpreters for the hearing impaired (whether or not also speech impaired), by the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts in accordance with the certification program established pursuant to subsection (b) of this section.

“(d) The presiding judicial officer, with the assistance of the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, shall utilize the services of the most available certified interpreter, or when no certified interpreter is reasonably available, as determined by the presiding judicial officer, the services of an otherwise competent interpreter, in any criminal or civil action initiated by the United States in a United States district court (including a petition for a writ of habeas corpus initiated in the name of the United States by a relator), if the presiding judicial officer determines on such officer's own motion or on the motion of a party that such party (including a defendant in a criminal case), or a witness who may present testimony in such action—

“(1) speaks only or primarily a language other than the English language; or

“(2) suffers from a hearing impairment (whether or not suffering also from a speech impairment)

so as to inhibit such party's comprehension of the proceedings or communication with counsel or the presiding judicial officer, or so as to inhibit such witness' comprehension of questions and the presentation of such testimony.

“(e) (1) If any interpreter is unable to communicate effectively with the presiding judicial officer, the United States attorney, a party (including a defendant in a criminal case), or a witness, the presiding judicial officer shall dismiss such interpreter and obtain the services of another interpreter in accordance with this section.

“(2) In any criminal or civil action in a United States district court, if the presiding judicial officer does not appoint an interpreter under subsection (d) of this section, an individual requiring the services of an interpreter may seek assistance of the clerk of court or the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts in obtaining the assistance of a certified interpreter.

“(f) (1) Any individual other than a witness who is entitled to interpretation under subsection (d) of this section may waive such interpretation in whole or in part. Such a waiver shall be effective only if approved by the presiding judicial officer and made expressly by such individual on the record after opportunity to consult with counsel and after the presiding judicial officer has explained to such individual, utilizing the services of the most available certified interpreter, or when no certified interpreter is reasonably available, as determined by the presiding judicial officer, the services of an otherwise competent interpreter, the nature and effect of the waiver.

Waiver, approval
and consultation.

“(2) An individual who waives under paragraph (1) of this subsection the right to an interpreter may utilize the services of a non-certified interpreter of such individual's choice whose fees, expenses, and costs shall be paid in the manner provided for the payment of such fees, expenses, and costs of an interpreter appointed under subsection (d) of this section.

“(g) (1) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection or section 1828 of this title, the salaries, fees, expenses, and costs incident to providing the services of interpreters under subsection (d) of this section shall be paid by the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts from sums appropriated to the Federal judiciary.

Salaries, fees,
and expenses.
Post, p. 2042.

“(2) Such salaries, fees, expenses, and costs that are incurred with respect to Government witnesses shall, unless direction is made under paragraph (3) of this subsection, be paid by the Attorney General from sums appropriated to the Department of Justice.

“(3) The presiding judicial officer may in such officer's discretion direct that all or part of such salaries, fees, expenses, and costs shall be apportioned between or among the parties or shall be taxed as costs in a civil action.

“(4) Any moneys collected under this subsection may be used to reimburse the appropriations obligated and disbursed in payment for such services.

“(h) In any action in a court of the United States where the presiding judicial officer establishes, fixes, or approves the compensation and expenses payable to an interpreter from funds appropriated to the Federal judiciary, the presiding judicial officer shall not establish, fix, or approve compensation and expenses in excess of the maximum allowable under the schedule of fees for services prescribed pursuant to subsection (b) of this section.

“(i) The term ‘presiding judicial officer’ as used in this section and section 1828 of this title includes a judge of a United States district court, a United States magistrate, and a referee in bankruptcy.

“Presiding
judicial officer.”

"United States district court."
Infra.

28 USC 132.

"(j) The term 'United States district court' as used in this section and section 1828 of this title includes any court created by Act of Congress in a territory which is invested with any jurisdiction of a district court of the United States established by section 132 of this title.

"(k) The interpretation provided by certified interpreters pursuant to this section shall be in the consecutive mode except that the presiding judicial officer, with the approval of all interested parties, may authorize a simultaneous or summary interpretation when such officer determines that such interpretation will aid in the efficient administration of justice. The presiding judicial officer on such officer's motion or on the motion of a party may order that special interpretation services as authorized in section 1828 of this title be provided if such officer determines that the provision of such services will aid in the efficient administration of justice.

28 USC 1828.

Program establishment.

"§ 1828. Special interpretation services

"(a) The Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts shall establish a program for the provision of special interpretation services in criminal actions and in civil actions initiated by the United States (including petitions for writs of habeas corpus initiated in the name of the United States by relators) in a United States district court. The program shall provide a capacity for simultaneous interpretation services in multidefendant criminal actions and multidefendant civil actions.

"(b) Upon the request of any person in any action for which special interpretation services established pursuant to subsection (a) are not otherwise provided, the Director, with the approval of the presiding judicial officer, may make such services available to the person requesting the services on a reimbursable basis at rates established in conformity with section 501 of the Act of August 31, 1951 (ch. 376, title 5, 65 Stat. 290; 31 U.S.C. 483a), but the Director may require the prepayment of the estimated expenses of providing the services by the person requesting them.

Expenses.

"(c) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, the expenses incident to providing services under subsection (a) of this section shall be paid by the Director from sums appropriated to the Federal judiciary. A presiding judicial officer, in such officer's discretion, may order that all or part of the expenses shall be apportioned between or among the parties or shall be taxed as costs in a civil action, and any moneys collected as a result of such order may be used to reimburse the appropriations obligated and disbursed in payment for such services.

"(d) Appropriations available to the Director shall be available to provide services in accordance with subsection (b) of this section, and moneys collected by the Director under that subsection may be used to reimburse the appropriations charged for such services. A presiding judicial officer, in such officer's discretion, may order that all or part of the expenses shall be apportioned between or among the parties or shall be taxed as costs in the action."

(b) The table of sections for chapter 119 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end thereof the following:

"1827. Interpreters in courts of the United States.

"1828. Special interpretation services."

SEC. 3. Section 604(a) of title 28, United States Code, is amended—
(a) by striking out paragraph (10) and inserting in lieu thereof:

“(10) (A) Purchase, exchange, transfer, distribute, and assign the custody of lawbooks, equipment, supplies, and other personal property for the judicial branch of Government (except the Supreme Court unless otherwise provided pursuant to paragraph (17)); (B) provide or make available readily to each court appropriate equipment for the interpretation of proceedings in accordance with section 1828 of this title; and (C) enter into and perform contracts and other transactions upon such terms as the Director may deem appropriate as may be necessary to the conduct of the work of the judicial branch of Government (except the Supreme Court unless otherwise provided pursuant to paragraph (17)), and contracts for nonpersonal services for pretrial services agencies, for the interpretation of proceedings, and for the provision of special interpretation services pursuant to section 1828 of this title may be awarded without regard to section 3709 of the Revised Statutes of the United States (41 U.S.C. 5);”;

Ante, p. 2042.

(b) by redesignating paragraph (13) as paragraph (17); and
(c) by inserting after paragraph (12) the following new paragraphs:

Interpreter programs, establishment.
Ante, p. 2040.

“(13) Pursuant to section 1827 of this title, establish a program for the certification and utilization of interpreters in courts of the United States;

“(14) Pursuant to section 1828 of this title, establish a program for the provision of special interpretation services in courts of the United States;

“(15) (A) In those districts where the Director considers it advisable based on the need for interpreters, authorize the full-time or part-time employment by the court of certified interpreters; (B) where the Director considers it advisable based on the need for interpreters, appoint certified interpreters on a full-time or part-time basis, for services in various courts when he determines that such appointments will result in the economical provision of interpretation services; and (C) pay out of moneys appropriated for the judiciary interpreters' salaries, fees, and expenses, and other costs which may accrue in accordance with the provisions of sections 1827 and 1828 of this title;

“(16) In the Director's discretion, (A) accept and utilize voluntary and uncompensated (gratuitous) services, including services as authorized by section 3102 of title 5, United States Code; and (B) accept, hold, administer, and utilize gifts and bequests of personal property for the purpose of aiding or facilitating the work of the judicial branch of Government, but gifts or bequests of money shall be covered into the Treasury;”.

SEC. 4. Section 604 of title 28, United States Code, is amended further by inserting after subsection (e) the following new subsections:

“(f) The Director may make, promulgate, issue, rescind, and amend rules and regulations (including regulations prescribing standards of conduct for Administrative Office employees) as may be necessary to carry out the Director's functions, powers, duties, and authority. The Director may publish in the Federal Register such rules, regulations,

Conduct standards, rules and regulations. Publication in Federal Register.

and notices for the judicial branch of Government as the Director determines to be of public interest; and the Director of the Federal Register hereby is authorized to accept and shall publish such materials.

Exchanges or
sales, evidence.

“(g) (1) When authorized to exchange personal property, the Director may exchange or sell similar items and may apply the exchange allowance or proceeds of sale in such cases in whole or in part payment for the property acquired, but any transaction carried out under the authority of this subsection shall be evidenced in writing.

Contracts.

“(2) The Director hereby is authorized to enter into contracts for public utility services and related terminal equipment for periods not exceeding ten years.”

SEC. 5. Section 602 of title 28, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

“§ 602. Employees

Compensation.

“(a) The Director shall appoint and fix the compensation of necessary employees of the Administrative Office in accordance with the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of title 5, relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates.

5 USC 5101 et
seq., 5331.

“(b) Notwithstanding any other law, the Director may appoint certified interpreters in accordance with section 604(a) (15) (B) of this title without regard to the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of title 5, relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates, but the compensation of any person appointed under this subsection shall not exceed the appropriate equivalent of the highest rate of pay payable for the highest grade established in the General Schedule, section 5332 of title 5.

Ante, p. 2043.

“(c) The Director may obtain personal services as authorized by section 3109 of title 5, at rates not to exceed the appropriate equivalent of the highest rate of pay payable for the highest grade established in the General Schedule, section 5332 of title 5.

Authority
delegations.

“(d) All functions of other officers and employees of the Administrative Office and all functions of organizational units of the Administrative Office are vested in the Director. The Director may delegate any of the Director's functions, powers, duties, and authority (except the authority to promulgate rules and regulations) to such officers and employees of the judicial branch of Government as the Director may designate, and subject to such terms and conditions as the Director may consider appropriate; and may authorize the successive redelegation of such functions, powers, duties, and authority as the Director may deem desirable. All official acts performed by such officers and employees shall have the same force and effect as though performed by the Director in person.”

SEC. 6. Section 603 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by striking out the second paragraph thereof.

Taxation of costs.

SEC. 7. Section 1920 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by striking out the period at the end of paragraph (5) and inserting a semicolon in lieu thereof and by inserting after paragraph (5) the following new paragraph:

“(6) Compensation of court appointed experts, compensation of interpreters, and salaries, fees, expenses, and costs of special interpretation services under section 1828 of this title.”

Repeal.

SEC. 8. Section 5(b) of the Act of September 23, 1959 (Public Law 86-370, 73 Stat. 652), is repealed.

28 USC 602 note.

SEC. 9. There are authorized to be appropriated to the judicial branch of Government such sums as may be necessary to carry out the amendments made by this Act.

Appropriation authorization.

SEC. 10. (a) Except as provided in subsection (b), this Act shall take effect on the date of the enactment of this Act.

Effective dates.
28 USC 602 note.

(b) Section 2 of this Act shall take effect ninety days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 11. Any contracts entered into under this Act or any of the amendments made by this Act shall be limited to such extent or in such amounts as are provided in advance in appropriation Acts.

28 USC 602 note.

Approved October 28, 1978.

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LEGISLATIVE HISTORY:

HOUSE REPORT No. 95-1687 accompanying H.R. 14030 (Comm. on the Judiciary).

SENATE REPORT No. 95-569 (Comm. on the Judiciary).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:

Vol. 123 (1977): Nov. 4, considered and passed Senate.

Vol. 124 (1978): Oct. 10, H.R. 14030 considered and passed House; passage vacated and S. 1315, amended, passed in lieu.

Oct. 13, Senate concurred in House amendment.