

Supreme Court of Ohio

Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio

Appendix H

CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT FOR COURT INTERPRETERS AND TRANSLATORS

Preamble.

Foreign language interpreters, sign language interpreters, and translators help ensure that individuals enjoy equal access to justice, including case and court functions and court support services. Foreign language interpreters, sign language interpreters, and translators are highly skilled professionals who fulfill an essential role by assisting in the pursuit of justice. They act strictly in the interest of the courts they serve and are impartial officers of those courts, with a duty to enhance the judicial process.

Definitions.

As used in this code, “provisionally qualified foreign language interpreter,” “Supreme Court certified foreign language interpreter,” “Supreme Court certified sign language interpreter,” and “translator” have the same meanings as in Rule 80 of the Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio.

Applicability.

This code applies to Supreme Court certified foreign language interpreters, provisionally qualified foreign language interpreters, Supreme Court certified sign language interpreters, and translators. This code shall bind all agencies and organizations that administer, supervise, use, or deliver interpreting or translating services in connection with any case or court function. A court may use this code to assist it in determining the qualifications of any individual providing services as an interpreter under Rule 702 of the Rules of Evidence.

Canon 1. High Standards of Conduct.

Interpreters and translators shall conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the dignity of the court and shall be as unobtrusive as possible, consistent with the ends of justice.

Commentary

Interpreters and translators should maintain high standards of conduct at all times to promote public confidence in the administration of justice.

Canon 2. Accuracy and Completeness.

Interpreters and translators shall render a complete and accurate interpretation or translation without altering, omitting, or adding anything to what is spoken or written, and shall do so

without explaining the statements of the original speaker or writer.

Commentary

In order to preserve the record of the court and assist in the administration of justice, interpreters should completely and accurately interpret the exact meaning of what is said or written without embellishing, explaining, omitting, adding, altering, or summarizing anything. This includes maintaining accuracy of style or register of speech, as well as not distorting the meaning of the source language, even if it appears obscene, incoherent, non-responsive, or a misstatement. Interpreters and translators have a duty to inform the court of any error, misinterpretation, or mistranslation so that the record may be promptly corrected. The terms “accurately,” “completely,” and “exact” do not signify a word-for-word or literal interpretation, but rather mean to convey the exact meaning of the discourse of the speaker or writer.

Canon 3. Impartiality and Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest.

Interpreters and translators shall be impartial and unbiased. Interpreters and translators shall refrain from conduct that may give the appearance of bias and shall disclose any real or perceived conflict of interest.

Commentary

Interpreters and translators must disclose to the court any prior involvement with a case or court function, parties, or witnesses that creates or could be viewed as creating a conflict of interest, provided such disclosure must not include anything that is privileged or confidential. The court must then determine whether the interpreter or translator may continue on the case or court function. Counsel for either party may petition the court for appointment of a different interpreter or translator on the basis of a conflict of interest and the court must determine on the record whether to release the interpreter or translator from the case or court function.

Canon 4. Confidentiality.

Interpreters and translators shall protect from unauthorized disclosure all privileged or other confidential communications, documents, or information they hear or obtain while acting in a professional capacity.

Commentary

Interpreters and translators must maintain confidentiality with respect to any communication, document, information, or other type of confidential matter, including police and medical records and attorney-client privileged communications protected under section 2317.02 of the Revised Code. Interpreters and translators must not derive, either directly or indirectly, any profit or advantage from any confidential communication, document, or information acquired while acting in a professional capacity.

Canon 5. Representation of Qualifications.

Interpreters and translators shall accurately and completely represent their credentials, certifications, training, references, and pertinent experience.

Commentary

Interpreters and translators have a duty to present accurately and completely any applicable credentials, certifications, training, references, and pertinent experience, consistent with Canon 6 of this code. It is essential that interpreters and translators present a complete and truthful account of their qualifications before appointment to allow the court to fairly evaluate their qualifications for delivering interpreting or translating services.

Canon 6. Proficiency.

Interpreters and translators shall provide professional services only in matters in which they can proficiently perform.

Commentary

By accepting an assignment, interpreters and translators warrant they have the skills, training, and understanding of terminology to interpret or translate accurately and effectively in the given setting, are fluent in the required languages, and have the ability to understand regional differences and dialects. Interpreters have a duty to request from the court and the parties all pertinent information and materials necessary to prepare for the case or court function.

Interpreters and translators should strive continually to improve language skills and knowledge of specialized vocabulary and familiarize themselves with the judicial system and any applicable court rules. Interpreters and translators are responsible for having the proper dictionaries and other reference materials available when needed.

Canon 7. Assessing and Reporting Impediments to Performance.

Interpreters and translators shall at all times assess their ability to perform effectively and accurately. If an interpreter or translator discovers anything impeding full compliance with the oath or affirmation of the interpreter or translator and this code, the interpreter or translator shall immediately report this information to the court.

Commentary

Interpreters and translators must immediately inform the court of any condition interfering with their ability to provide accurate and complete interpretation or translation. This may include excessively rapid, quiet, or indistinct speech, physical interference such as inability to see exhibits, noise in their surroundings, or any other interfering factor.

Interpreters and translators must inform the court if they are having difficulties obtaining pertinent information or materials required to prepare for a case or court function that may impede their ability to perform adequately. If at the time of a hearing or trial the interpreter or translator has not been provided with necessary information or materials, the interpreter or translator must inform the court on the record and request a recess to review such information or materials.

Interpreters and translators should withdraw from an assignment if they are unable to understand or satisfactorily communicate with the non-English speaking, limited English proficient, deaf or hard-of-hearing party, witness, or juror, or if they lack required skills, preparation, or terminology to perform effectively in the case or court function for which they have been summoned.

Canon 8. Duty to Report Ethical Violations.

Interpreters and translators shall report to the court any efforts to impede their compliance with any law, this code, or other official policy governing interpreting or translating. Interpreters and translators shall promptly report to the appropriate legal or disciplinary authority if they observe another interpreter or translator improperly performing an assignment; accepting remuneration apart from authorized fees; disclosing privileged or confidential communications, documents, or information; or otherwise committing a breach of this code.

Commentary

Interpreters and translators must report to the court any ethical violation, action, or information that refers to the persistence of a party demanding that an interpreter or translator violate this code, subject to any applicable privilege.

Canon 9. Scope of Practice.

Interpreters and translators shall not give legal advice, communicate their conclusions with respect to any answer, express personal opinions to individuals for whom they are interpreting or translating, or engage in any other activity that may be construed to constitute a service other than interpreting or translating while serving as an interpreter.

Commentary

Since interpreters and translators are only responsible for enabling others to communicate, they should exclusively limit themselves to the activity of interpreting and translating. Interpreters and translators should refrain from initiating communications while interpreting or translating or at all times except as set out below.

Interpreters may be required to initiate communications during a case or court function when they find it necessary to seek assistance in performing their duties. Examples of such circumstances include seeking direction when unable to understand or express a word or thought, requesting speakers to moderate their rate of communication or repeat or rephrase something, correcting their own interpreting errors, or notifying the court of reservations about their ability to satisfy an assignment competently. In such instances the interpreter should refer to him or herself in the third person, making it clear and on the record that the interpreter is speaking for him or herself.

At no time may an interpreter give advice. An interpreter should not explain the purpose of forms, services, or otherwise act as counselor or advisor. The interpreter may sight translate language on a form, but may not provide independent legal advice as to the purpose of the form or instruct the litigant as to the proper manner of completing the form.

Interpreters and translators should not personally serve to perform acts that are the official responsibility of other court officials including, but not limited to, court clerks, pretrial release investigators or interviewers, or probation officers, except as required by and in the presence of such officials.

Canon 10. Restrictions from Public Comment.

Consistent with Canon 4 of this code, interpreters and translators shall not publicly discuss, report, or offer an opinion concerning a matter in which they are or have been engaged, even when that information is not privileged or required by law to be confidential.

Commentary

Interpreters and translators must refrain from making public comments or giving opinions or reports concerning any particulars of a case or court function in which they are or have provided professional services, regardless whether the information is privileged or confidential. This restriction does not apply to general public comments or reports concerning the interpreting or translating professions.