

Meet the Trainers



Melinda Gonzalez-Hibner is a Spanish court interpreter certified by the Colorado and U.S. Courts and qualified by the U.S. Department of State. She currently serves as the staff interpreter for the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas. Melinda holds a B.A. from the University of Texas, a M.Sc. from the London School of Economics, and recently attended the Graduate Program in Interpreting and Translation Studies at the University of Maryland. Her interpreting experience is diverse, including court, community and conference assignments. Previously, Melinda served as the Colorado State Court Interpreter Program Administrator, where she worked actively to support language access to the courts, and promoted the highest level of professional practice for interpreters working in all languages. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators, a member of the ASTM F-43 Language Interpreting Subcommittee, and a founding member and past Co-Chair of the Colorado Association of Professional Interpreters. Melinda is a frequent presenter at professional conferences and is a lively court interpreter trainer, regularly teaching interpreter ethics and skills in different states. She is an active member of ATA, CAPI, CTA, NCATA and NAJIT.



Carla M. Mathers, Esquire, SC: L has practiced law in Maryland and the District of Columbia since 1993. She currently serves as General Counsel and Legal Program Manager for TCS Associates Interpreting, a prominent sign language interpreting service in Maryland. Ms. Mathers' law degree is from Howard University School of Law. Ms. Mathers' interpreting degree is from the College of Southern Idaho. Ms. Mathers sat on the Advisory Group for Language Access to develop standards for language access in courts for the American Bar Association. Ms. Mathers also sat on the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts' Advisory Committee on Interpreters Sub-committee on Ethics and Sub-committee on Testing and Training. Ms. Mathers is the Legal Program Coordinator for MARIE Center/DOIT Center at the University of Northern Colorado. She has served as an adjunct instructor for the Gallaudet University Department of Interpretation teaching legal interpreting, among other courses. She served as Vice President for the Conference of Interpreter Trainers and sat on the Board of Directors for the Deaf Abused Women's Network in Washington, D.C. Ms. Mathers is the author of *Sign Language Interpreters in Court: Understanding Best Practices*, a text for interpreters, attorneys and courts to understand the principles underlying ASL court interpreting.



Sophia N. Akbar is the Language Access Services Specialist at the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC). Sophia manages the AOIC interpreter certification program in Illinois and the statewide interpreter registry. Sophia also oversees implementation of the IL Supreme Court Language Access Policy and serves on the Language Access Advisory Board, which enforces the Illinois Code of Interpreter Ethics. She assists each of the 24 circuit courts in

creating and updating a Language Access Plan, which describes each circuit court's practices and procedures related to providing language assistance services. Sophia conducts trainings for judges and court personnel to improve and standardize language access practices. Sophia also reviews data collected from the circuit courts to assess the current need for interpreters across Illinois and the current status of interpreter usage and language access services in the courts.

Sophia is an attorney with a background in poverty law and policy implementation. Her prior legal experience involved helping disadvantaged communities access the legal system. Sophia is not trained as an interpreter, but speaks Urdu and has studied Arabic. Having grown up in an immigrant community, she is aware of the challenges language barriers can present to limited English proficient persons. Sophia graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in Public Policy and a minor in Arabic in 2008, and graduated from the University of Iowa College of Law in 2012. She has worked at legal aid organizations, including the Legal Assistance Foundation and the Shriver Center on Poverty Law in Chicago. Prior to joining the AOIC, Sophia worked for the Illinois House of Representatives and assisted passing legislation in the areas of consumer protection, public benefits, and child support.