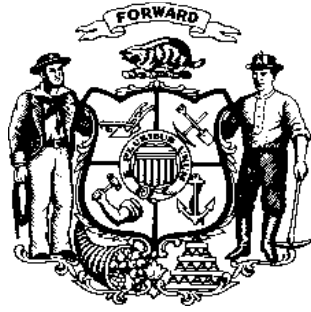




Wisconsin Judicial Council

William Gleisner, III, Chair
Margo Kirchner, Vice-Chair

MINUTES

Wisconsin Judicial Council Committee on Municipal Court Interpreters

August 4, 2026. 12:00 P.M. – 1:00 P.M.

Virtual Meeting

Members Present: Chair Hon. Kristine Snow, Ruby De Leon, Hon. Molly Gena, Hon. Jason Hanson, Hon. Margo Kirchner, Susan Lund, Fatima Malik, Hannah Schwarz, Hon. Jim Gramling, Ryan Sendelbach, Dawn Wilcox

Members Excused: Ann Olson, Nora Platt, Hon. Kevin Rathburn

I. Introductions and Roll Call

Judge Snow called the meeting to order at 12:01 PM. Committee members were identified and quorum was established.

II. Review and approval of June meeting minutes

Judge Kirchner moves to approve the minutes. Attorney Lund seconds. There are no objections. Judge Gramling abstains because he was not present at the meeting. June minutes are approved.

III. Discussion of data review and updated survey results with Attorney Zibolski

Attorney Zibolski gave an overview of some conclusions from her follow up with municipal courts regarding the survey conducted by the Director of State courts office. Several additional courts participated, including Milwaukee County. Attorney Zibolski noted that colloquially all judges expect a certified or in person interpreter for trials, but that trials are rare in many courts. The highest proportion of inconsistency is during initial appearance, where there is a range of expectations including smaller jurisdictions who allow technologies or family friends to translate. Attorney Zibolski suggests this be considered by the Committee. Attorney Zibolski agrees to formalize her data for distribution.

Judge Snow agrees that initial appearance is something to consider but the survey outcome suggests that costs are not insurmountable and may be supported by the new fee increases recently approved by the legislature. Judge Snow and Judge Kirchner agree that the costs from Milwaukee may support services like Language Line as a cost-effective service, considering the size of Milwaukee compared to their overall reported costs. Judge Snow asks why Fitchburg Municipal has such high costs, and Attorney Zibolski notes that they retain in person interpreters for all hearings.

Attorney Sendelbach points out that the fee increase mostly tracks inflation and is not a windfall for municipal courts. He states a lot of smaller courts will still have issues meeting costs if interpreters are mandatory and that cost could be prohibitive for these jurisdictions. Judge Snow notes she understands and states many jurisdictions have been moving to consolidate to answer cost issues. Attorney Sendelbach suggests the Committee should explore options to send interpreter cases to circuit court or ask for grants to specifically assist with interpreter costs. Judge Hanson agrees, noting that many fees incurred by municipal courts go toward funding circuit courts, so maybe some state funding should support this need. A one-size-fits-all approach may not work.

Judge Kirchner points out that some statutory fees, like jail fees or DNA fees, do not come back to municipalities. She wonders if there could be a new fee for interpreter services but notes this would require a statutory change through the legislature, that could be a longer process and considering the minimal cost to municipalities could be unnecessary.

IV. Review of materials from Judge Kirchner on interpreter best practice recently taught at the Municipal Court training

Judge Kirchner gave a quick overview of the best practice training that she and Alexandra Wirth taught recently to municipal judges. She discussed a court case out of Dane County that highlighted issues with a Spanish speaking officer during a law enforcement investigation. She also highlights the differences between different categories of interpreters: competent, qualified and certified. Phone services like Language Line would be considered “competent.” There is not currently a definition of “competent” interpreter but presumably all the service agencies on the DOA contact list would qualify as “competent.”

V. Committee consideration of further action for interpreter requirement for municipalities, recommendation to municipalities or no action

Judge Snow is concerned the Committee will need to meet more often to explore some of the issues raised, including recommendations to address the fiscal side of any changes suggested. She will ask Attorney Zibolski to follow up with suggested dates for meeting in the next month. Judge Snow asks Attorney Sendelbach and Judge Hanson to investigate some of the financial solutions they suggested for the next meeting.

Judge Snow asked if there was general consensus on a recommendation for interpreter requirements for municipalities. Judge Hanson states there is a consensus around best practice but feels it is premature to move forward without more fiscal information. Attorney Lund points out that best practices already exist and are being ignored. Judge Kirchner agrees, noting best practice is just a suggestion. Judge Gramling echoes the sentiment.

Judge Snow notes this is an important discussion and the Committee will schedule a further meeting to continue discussion. She does warn that the Supreme Court budget for the upcoming fiscal year is likely already completed. Judge Snow defers discussion of item issues VI and VII until the next meeting.

VI. Discussion of ideas for framework of interpreter requirement, interpreter recommendation or no action

Deferred.

VII. Updates from committee members on research suggestions, expertise, and recommended next steps

Deferred.

VIII. Adjournment

Judge Hanson moves to adjourn, Judge Gramling seconds. No nays. Meeting adjourned at 1:07pm.

Notes by Attorney Zibolski