

Bi-lingual PFA Forms

Pennsylvania's Judiciary is offering protection from abuse forms in multiple languages to help address domestic violence issues in families who are not proficient in English.

The new forms underscore the state court system's long-standing commitment to promote equal access to justice regardless of racial, gender and ethnic background. Posted online to provide easy access, the forms are an important part of civil court proceedings, and failure to understand and complete them properly can delay or invalidate proceedings.

"Court proceedings can be hard to understand, even if you speak English," said Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille. "These new forms help ensure that all citizens have full access to the court system and its resources by being able to access documents in the person's native language."

More than a dozen forms related to the process of obtaining protection orders — in 10 of the state's most common non-English languages — now are posted on the Unified Judicial System's website: www.pacourts.us Visitors can access the forms at the bottom of the home page under the area labeled "Forms."

The forms are available in: Arabic, Simplified Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Khmer (Cambodian), Korean, Polish, Portuguese (Brazilian), Russian and Vietnamese. The documents are in a bilingual format with the left hand column in English, and the right hand side in the foreign language.

Free and easy access to documents in different languages allows those with limited English skills to more readily understand and use them. The forms also enhance enforcement of court orders by law enforcement, and help people required to comply with them better understand the process.

Forms for statewide use include: the petition for protection from abuse and weapons attachment; notice of hearing and order; temporary protection order and its weapons attachment; service affidavit; final protection order and its weapons attachment; notice of hearing; notice to vacate and subpoena.

The postings also include four forms used exclusively by the Philadelphia courts, which have a slightly different filing and serving process than the rest of the state. The Philadelphia forms consist of an intake form; service instructions; information sheet and assessment instructions. There are 15 documents in each language, but only those 11 used statewide will be posted to the website.

Language Service Associates, a company located in Bucks County was hired to complete the translations after a competitive bidding process. A \$200,000 grant from the Stop Violence Against Women program, which operates under the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, paid for the work. The new forms complement those previously translated into Spanish by AOPC staff that served as a template for the additional languages.

The process took place in six phases over a 24-month period. A guide for the translation work was provided by the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts, which is a National Center for State Courts-based organization.