

Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition PICC

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Campaign for Litigants' Equal Participation

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PICC member organizations include:

Archdiocese of Philadelphia,
Office for Pastoral Care for
Refugees and Migrants

Camden Center for Law and
Social Justice

Catholic Social Services,
Archdiocese of Philadelphia,
Immigration Program

Center for Literacy

Community Legal Services

Friends of Farmworkers, Inc.

HIAS and Council Migration
Service of Philadelphia

Jaisohn Center

Jewish Educational and
Vocational Services, Center
for New Americans

Jewish Community Relations
Council of Greater
Philadelphia

Lutheran Children and Family
Services

Maternity Care Coalition

Nationalities Service Center

Pennsylvania Immigration
Resource Center

Philadelphia Area
Immigration Resource Center

Philadelphia Citizens for
Children and Youth

Project SHINE, Center for
Intergenerational Learning,
Temple University

PRIME - Ecumenical
Commitment to Refugees

SeniorLAW Center

Service Employees
International Union, Local 36

Southeast Asian Mutual
Assistance Associations
Coalition

Victim/Witness Services of
South Philadelphia

**PICC was formerly known
as SERICC, the Southeast
Regional Immigration and
Citizenship Coalition**

The Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC) has initiated a “**Campaign for Litigants' Equal Participation**” calling for prompt implementation of recommendations for by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Judicial System to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court last month for litigants' equal access to the judicial system of Pennsylvania without regard to their English language proficiency or hearing disabilities.

PICC has been joined in this campaign by a wide array of organizations that recognize the fundamental importance of addressing the continuing problems experienced by limited English Proficient persons.

PICC has consistently identified addressing the issues of Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals in accessing services and benefits as a fundamental task for PICC consistent with our mission to represent the needs of immigrants, migrants, refugees and other new Americans living in Pennsylvania.

In March 2003 the Pennsylvania Supreme Court released the report of the Committee on Racial and Gender Bias in the Judicial System that made extensive findings and recommendations after exhaustive study as to changes needed to make the state judicial system and state administrative agencies accessible to persons with Limited English Proficiency (See: http://friendsfw.org/LEP/LEP_PA.htm).

The Committee on Racial and Gender Bias recommended to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court that the Supreme Court should:

1. Establish for all courts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania a policy that all persons, including parties to judicial proceedings, witnesses appearing therein, victims in criminal proceedings, and members of the public seeking information from offices of the courts, shall have equal access to justice in the judicial system of Pennsylvania without regard to their English language proficiency (*or hearing impairments*).
2. Require that all courts provide qualified interpreters to litigants at no charge, in order that LEP parties and witnesses may fully and fairly participate in court proceedings and obtain reasonable access to the court system.
3. Require that the courts translate forms and other documents to the extent necessary to provide access to the court system to those unable to read English.

4. Require that all court interpreters obtain certification pursuant to a recognized statewide certification program, maintain their proficiency through continuing education, and adhere to standards of professional conduct.

5. Require the adoption of a code of professional responsibility for judicial interpreters together with mechanisms to assure that all interpreters are familiar with the code and are subject to discipline for any violation.

6. Establish within the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) a Language Services Office, similar to those established by other states, staffed by professional administrative personnel experienced with issues related to court interpretation and translation, and funded sufficiently to carry out its mission.

See: http://friendsfw.org/LEP/LEP_Litigants.htm#Recommendations.

Following release of the report, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court appointed a Judicial Council of Pennsylvania Ethnic and Racial Task Group chaired by Philadelphia City Solicitor Nelson Diaz to review the report and "...recommend methods of implementing as many of the committee's suggestions as the Supreme Court finds appropriate." See:

<http://www.courts.state.pa.us/Index/aopc/pressreleases/prrel03304.asp>

PICC's "Campaign for Litigants' Equal Participation" will request a meeting with Philadelphia City Solicitor Nelson Diaz and other available Pennsylvania Supreme Court Ethnic and Racial Task Group members to discuss appropriate steps and procedures for prompt implementation of the Limited English proficiency Litigants recommendations.

PICC includes 22 member organizations concerned with the rights of immigrant communities and has been joined in this "Campaign for Litigants' Equal Participation" by:

- Asian American Bar Association of the Delaware Valley
- American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania
- Asian Americans United
- Civil Rights Committee of the Philadelphia Bar Association
- Disabilities Law Project
- Hispanic Bar Association of Pennsylvania
- Legal Clinic for the Disabled, Inc.,
- National Lawyers Guild Philadelphia Chapter
- Pennsylvania Immigrant Workers Rights Coalition
- Philadelphia Folklore Project
- Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia

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