

# Requesting Team Interpreting

## When to request a team

- **Before you are sent to the courtroom.** Tell the coordinator that you request a second interpreter to work in a team with you. Do this as soon as you know you are being assigned to a trial, a preliminary hearing, motion or other lengthy hearing that requires extended simultaneous interpretation. You should make the request when you know that you will be interpreting for multiple witnesses or for a key witness in a case that is likely to involve very lengthy testimony.
- **In the courtroom.** If no team is provided, inform the judge at the beginning of the proceeding that you requested a second interpreter to work with you in order to perform team interpreting and that you would appreciate the judge's support in that request. Tell the judge that since there is no team, you will have to ask for frequent breaks in order to protect the accuracy and completeness of your interpretation. Put this on the record if you can.

## What is a reasonable frequency for break requests?

Studies show that accuracy drops sharply after 30 minutes of simultaneous or consecutive interpreting. Further, an interpreter's error rate increases steadily even when the interpreter believes she is not fatigued and is performing adequately. Therefore, you should not wait until you know undeniably that your skills are seriously impaired to ask for a break. You should request a break every 30 to 60 minutes based on the nature of the proceedings. Be reasonable about this. If the pace of the proceedings is very slow, routine and familiar, or if the proceeding contains frequent and long pauses in the testimony, you may be able to continue longer. However, when the interpreting is sustained and of normal complexity and speed, asking for a break every 30 to 50 minutes is reasonable and necessary. If the testimony is above average in speed or difficulty- for example expert witness testimony, jury instructions, or closing arguments- you should ask for a break every 30 minutes.

## How to ask for a break

Be sure to inform the judge at the beginning of the proceedings that you had requested a team to avoid this problem, but since you are working alone you will need frequent breaks. Ask the judge if you can signal the bailiff or raise your hand when you need a break. If you do not have a prearranged signal, simply wait for a pause in the proceeding and speak up:

❖ *"Your honor, the interpreter requests a break."*

If the judge denies you a break, continue to work. When you become too fatigued to vouch for the accuracy of your work, speak up at the first available pause in the proceedings:

❖ *"Your honor, the interpreter requests a break."*

If the break is denied again respond as follows:

❖ *"For the record, I need to inform the court at this time that due to fatigue, the interpreter can no longer stand by the accuracy or completeness of the interpretation. It is my duty under my code of professional conduct to report this fact to the court. "*

## Outreach and Education

To the extent that you are comfortable doing so, ask to speak to the judge about team interpreting either before or after the proceeding. You can simply offer the booklet of information compiled by CFI, *Team Interpreting in Legal Proceedings*, and let the judge know that you find the practice valid and necessary.