

USTP Language Assistance Program Data Is Available on New ‘Interactive Dashboard’

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In April 2011, the United States Trustee Program (USTP or Program) introduced a new interactive “dashboard” to show summary statistics based on data collected on the USTP’s Language Assistance Program (LAP). The dashboard presents the summary statistics through visual displays -- maps, graphs, charts and lists -- that change according to the viewer’s choice of state, city or language. The data reveal that the LAP has benefited a significant number of debtors with limited English proficiency across the nation. This article will summarize the LAP statistics and highlight the various “user-friendly” features of the interactive dashboard.

Section 341 of the Bankruptcy Code requires every debtor to attend a meeting of creditors (section 341 meeting) and answer questions about the bankruptcy case under oath. The USTP has identified the section 341 meeting as the predominant bankruptcy-related proceeding requiring language interpreter services during the consumer bankruptcy process. Bankruptcy terminology can be intimidating for persons with limited English proficiency, making it difficult for them to communicate and fully understand what is presented to them throughout this process.

To assist individuals with limited English proficiency, the USTP provides telephonic interpreter services at section 341 meetings at no cost to debtors. The USTP contracts with three telephonic interpreter services to provide interpretation in 196 languages. Interpreters must be able to interpret legal terminology and understand common bankruptcy terms that may need to be explained to the debtor. Trustees have been provided with the necessary information to request interpreters during section 341 meetings. Meeting rooms are equipped with language cards that enable the debtor to point to the desired language and to help trustees identify the language in which assistance is needed. The trustee can then call the telephonic interpreter service, and an interpreter is generally able to join the call within minutes.

Telephonic interpreter services currently are available in 250 meeting room locations. The USTP continues to explore wireless technology for those locations where permanent phone lines and equipment cannot be installed.

Summary Statistics¹

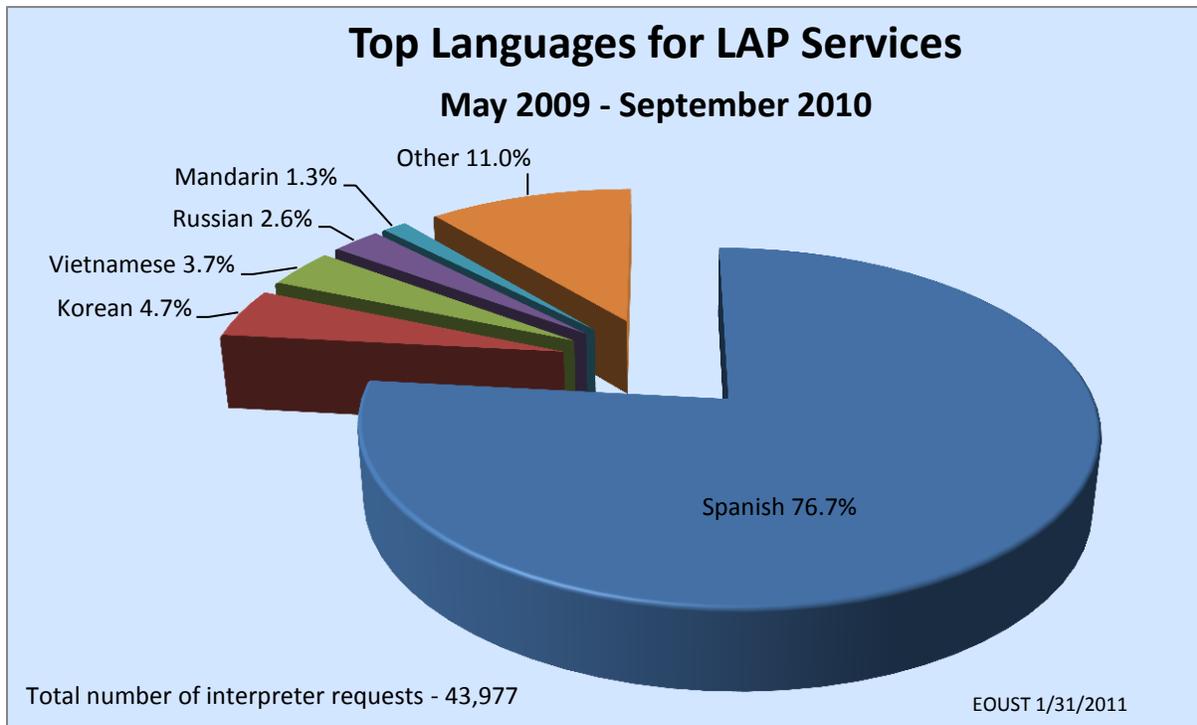
Between May 2009 and September 30, 2010, telephonic interpreter services were used 43,977 times, totaling 7,389 hours of interpretation in 81 different languages. This equates to use

¹ Statistics on LAP usage are based on invoices received from the telephonic interpreter services.

of interpreter services in about 2 percent of bankruptcy filings in USTP districts during this period.²

Spanish has been the most requested language to date. Based on the data collected since May 2009, nearly 77 percent of the services have been requested in Spanish, followed by Korean (4.7 percent), Vietnamese (3.7 percent), Russian (2.6 percent) and Mandarin (1.3 percent). The remaining requests are divided among 76 other languages. See Figure 1.

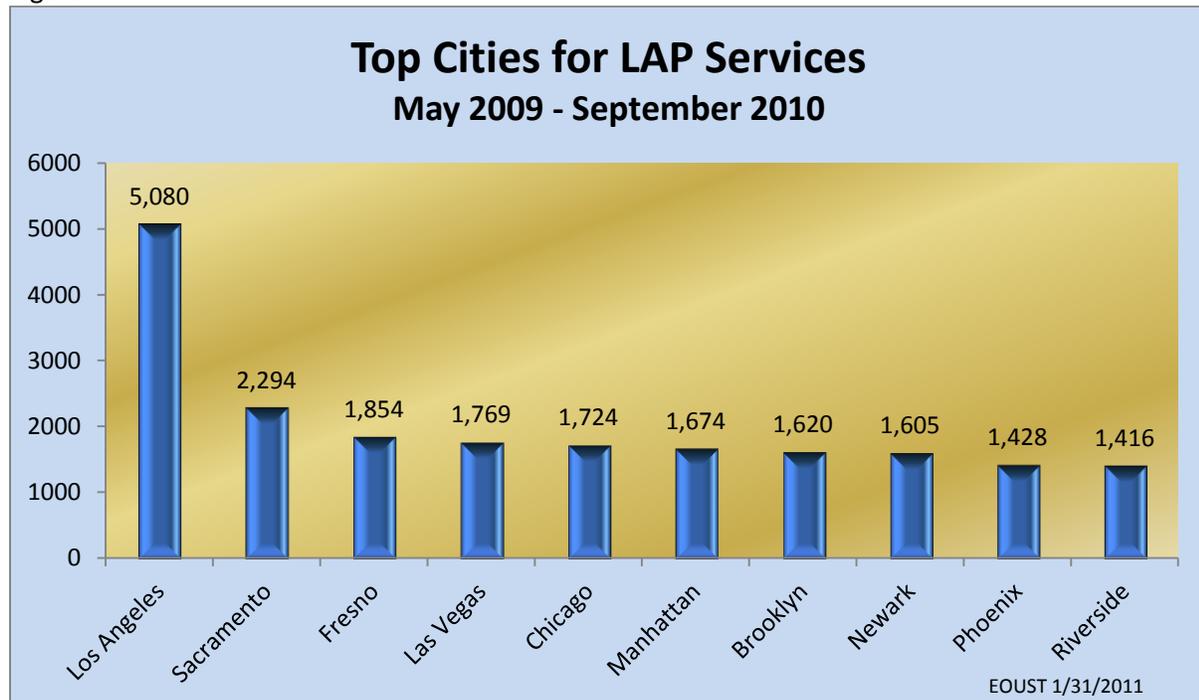
Figure 1



² Telephonic interpreter services are available to trustees conducting 341 meetings for chapters 7, 12 and 13. The service may also be used by USTP staff to conduct chapter 11 initial debtor interviews and examinations under Fed. R. Bankr. P. 2004.

Ten cities accounted for nearly 50 percent of all telephonic interpreter requests. Los Angeles led with over 5,000 separate interpreter requests. Nine other cities, including three in California, used the services at least 1,400 times each. The remaining interpreter usage was distributed among 93 other cities. See Figure 2.

Figure 2



Publicly Available Data; Interactive Dashboard

Data collected on the use of telephonic interpreter services are available to the public on the USTP's Web site at www.justice.gov/ust/eo/public_affairs/data_files/lap/index.htm and on the federal government statistics site www.data.gov. A total of 17 LAP data sets have been posted that include data collected from May 2009 through September 2010. These data sets were originally posted as part of the President's Open Government Initiative to increase transparency in government. Data fields include the location of the USTP office, the language requested, the duration of the call and the month and year of the interpretation session. These data sets are formatted as tab-delimited text files for use with statistical or spreadsheet software.

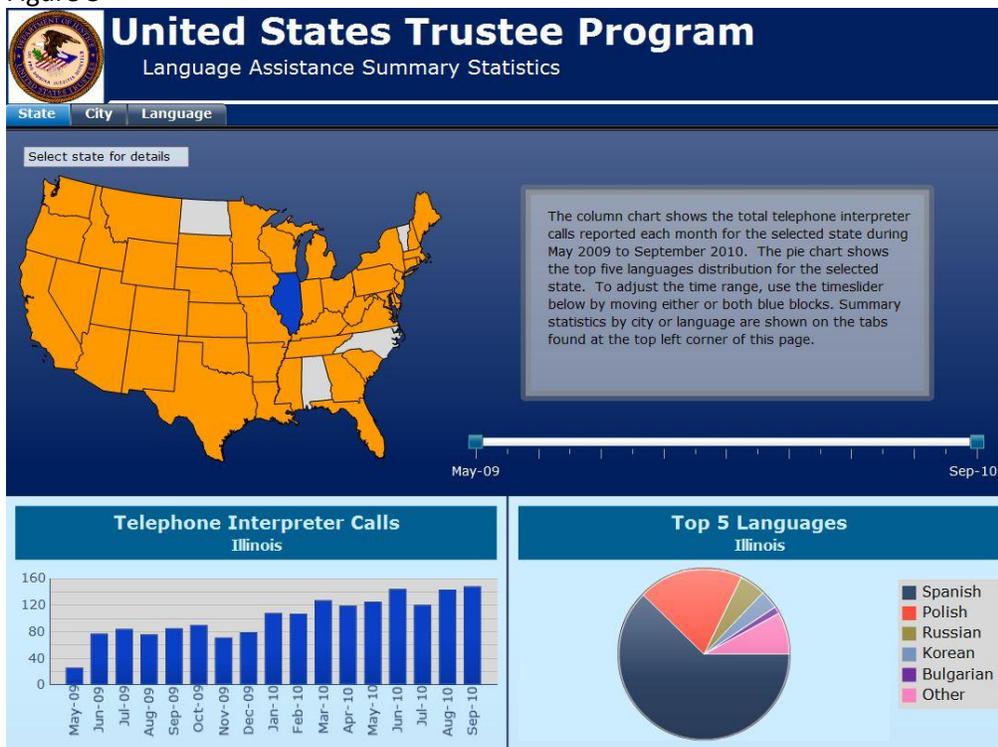
In addition, the USTP has developed the LAP interactive dashboard using posted data. While the tab-delimited text files provide a comprehensive source of information for researchers, the dashboard allows the user to view compiled data in easy-to-understand maps, graphs, charts and lists that change at the click of a mouse. The dashboard, available at http://www.justice.gov/ust/eo/public_affairs/data_files/lap/lap_statistics/index.htm, consists of

three tabs, each displaying different data facets by state, city and language. The following describes the information accessible through each tab.

State Tab

The state tab includes a map that shows telephonic interpreter services in every state within the jurisdiction of the Program, except North Dakota and Vermont.³ The map is accompanied by a bar graph that displays the monthly requests for interpreter services for a chosen state and a pie chart that displays the language distribution for that state. The bar graph and pie chart change to reflect state-specific data as the user makes a different state selection. A time slider allows the user to adjust the monthly time range for interpreter services usage in a particular state. See Figure 3.

Figure 3



Although there are many factors that influence the volume of requests for interpreter services, bankruptcy filing numbers and linguistic diversity play a big role. For example, California, which led the nation in bankruptcy filings in Fiscal Years 2009 and 2010, also had the

³ Alabama and North Carolina are not under the jurisdiction of the USTP. Telephonic interpreter services are not available in North Dakota. Vermont had no requests through FY 2010.

most requests for interpreter services. California is also the most linguistically diverse state.⁴ States with the fewest requests for language interpreter services, including Alaska, Delaware, Montana, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming, are among the least linguistically diverse states.⁵

While requests for Spanish interpreter services constituted the largest proportion of LAP requests in every state, there were many variations among states in other languages requested. For example, Michigan had the highest percentage of requests for Arabic interpreters; the highest percentage of Polish interpreter requests came from Illinois; and the highest percentage of Hmong interpreter requests came from Minnesota.⁶

City Tab

A second tab on the dashboard features LAP statistics by city. Requests for interpreter services are reported for the city where the section 341 meeting takes place. As of September 30, 2010, interpreter services were used in a total of 103 cities. Similar to the state tab, a line chart displays calls by month reported for each city, showing monthly trends. The languages requested each month are shown in a pie chart, and the viewer can focus on a specific monthly timeframe.

In some of the nation's most ethnically diverse cities, interpreters have assisted a significant percentage of bankruptcy filers. For example, between May 2009 and September 2010 language assistance was provided in about 12 percent of Manhattan's consumer filings, and Fresno and Brooklyn each had usage levels exceeding 9 percent of consumer filings.

Language Tab

The third tab on the dashboard shows telephonic interpreter services requests by language. A list of the languages along with the number of requests is displayed, and users can sort languages alphabetically or by level of LAP usage. The map in the language tab indicates cities where services have been requested for each selected language. The monthly requests for interpreter services, as well as the top 10 cities in which each language was requested, are displayed in a column and a pie chart for the language selected. The map and the charts change as the user selects a different language. See Figure 4.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey, First Ancestry Reported. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Illinois has the highest percentage of Polish speakers, Michigan has the second highest percentage of Arabic speakers and Minnesota has the second highest percentage of Hmong speakers in the country. U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey, Asian Alone by Selected Groups. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

Figure 4



As of September 30, 2010, interpreter services received requests for assistance in 81 languages. The range of requests for a given language varied from one to 32,835, with Spanish being the most requested and Azari, Amerindian, Cebuano, Dogrib, Fuzhou, Malay, Mandingo, Navajo, Nuer and Uzbek being the least requested.

Not surprisingly, since it is the second most commonly spoken language in the United States after English, Spanish was requested in all 103 cities using LAP services. Other linguistic patterns may be based on historic immigration trends. For example, Armenian language requests were clustered around Los Angeles and the far northeastern part of the country. This is consistent with U.S. Census Bureau data reporting that more than half of all Armenian speakers in the United States live in California and nearly one-fifth live in the far northeastern states.⁷

Conclusion

Since implementation, the USTP’s LAP has provided telephonic interpreter services to individuals with limited English proficiency in over 43,000 cases, in 81 different languages, across 103 cities. The Program will continue to expand the number of locations to assist individuals needing interpretation assistance in remote areas. As more data become available, the

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey, First Ancestry Reported. Available at <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

USTP will post new data sets on the Web site for use in statistical research, and update the interactive dashboard to provide a visual display of summary data.