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To: Interested Persons

From: Hon. Vanessa Ruiz, Chair, ABA Project on Standards for Language Access to State Courts

Re: Announcement of ABA Language Access Standards Project, "Laying the Path: Creating National Standards for Language Access in State Courts"

Date: June 14, 2010

The American Bar Association, through its Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants and several other ABA sub-groups, has embarked upon a project to create standards for the provision of language access in state courts. Through these standards, the ABA seeks to establish guidelines which are practical, universal, and effective at creating access to state courts for individuals with limited English proficiency.

Language access through professional interpretation of spoken communication, translation of written communications and integrated capacity for multilingual operations and staff has become an essential component of a functional and fair justice system. However, adequate systems to assure language access do not exist in many jurisdictions, and state courts lack guidance on how to analyze the need and implement effective strategies for language access in their court systems.

The project will be guided by a select national Advisory Group that will include representatives from across the range of those working in the field of language access: judges, court administrators, advocates for those with limited English proficiency, civil legal aid leaders, indigent defense leaders, interpreters and translators, educators, and other relevant stakeholders. The Advisory Group will oversee the development of the draft standards and will assist in gaining feedback and collaboration from members' stakeholder and local communities. The draft standards will be circulated widely for comment among interested parties. The standards will then be brought to the ABA House of Delegates in August 2011 for adoption as ABA policy.

The ABA has retained two individuals with substantial language access expertise to serve as consultants to the project, Gillian Dutton and Kristi Cruz of Seattle University, who will conduct research and draft proposed standards under the guidance and review of the Advisory Group.

Those interested in learning more about the project should contact project consultant Gillian Dutton, Assistant Professor, Seattle University School of Law, School of Law Annex, 1215 E. Columbia, Seattle, WA 98122, Tel. 206-398-4010, Email: duttong@seattleu.edu.