Interpreter Reference Handout

Interpreting for Victims & Witnesses in Criminal Proceedings

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① Trauma-Informed Interpreting

What trauma does to speech

Non-linear narrative	Victims jump between events or repeat details. The brain stores trauma in fragments — this is neurologically normal, not dishonest.
Fragmented syntax	Incomplete sentences, trailing off, false starts. Render faithfully. Do not complete the witness's thought.
Flat affect	Emotional detachment during testimony is a recognized dissociative response. A calm voice describing violence is not implausible.
Sudden silence	The witness may freeze mid-sentence. Wait. Do not prompt. Signal to the court only if silence is prolonged.
Hypervigilance	Whispered speech, averted gaze, physical agitation — observable context. Do not editorialize or interpret the subtext.
Code-switching	Witnesses may shift registers or languages mid-sentence under stress. Match what you hear. Do not normalize.

Core obligation

Render what is said — not what you think the witness meant. Hesitations, false starts, hedges, and emotional markers are part of the record. Your job is fidelity, not clarity.

Reluctant witnesses — what to render

- Every hedge: 'I don't remember,' 'maybe,' 'I'm not sure' — render each one exactly. Hedges are testimony.
- Recantation language: 'That's not what I said' goes into the record as spoken.
- Monosyllabic answers: 'Sí,' 'No,' 'No sé' — do not expand. Brevity is data.
- Silence: note to the court that interpretation is suspended; never prompt the witness to continue.

What you never do

- Prompt, encourage, or console the witness — verbally or nonverbally.
- Signal with facial expression or body language whether testimony 'sounded good.'
- Complete a sentence the witness did not finish.
- Simplify, clarify, or smooth grammar in the target language.
- Explain legal terms to the witness — redirect to counsel every time.
- Serve as intermediary between any party and the witness.

Vicarious trauma & self-care

Secondary traumatic stress is real. Symptoms: intrusive thoughts, emotional numbing, hypervigilance, disrupted sleep. Recognition is the first step.

- Request breaks during extended testimony — interpreter fatigue is a legitimate professional basis.
- Debrief in writing or with a trusted colleague after difficult assignments.
- Know your right to recuse from assignments that compromise your impartiality.
- Use peer networks: CALI, NAJIT, your regional interpreter community.

② Key Terminology English · Español

Victim rights & proceedings

English Term	Español — Equivalente
Victim impact statement	*Declaración de impacto a la víctima*
Right to be present	*Derecho de la víctima a estar presente*
Right to be heard	*Derecho de la víctima a ser escuchada*
Marsy's Law (CA / NV / AZ)	*Ley Marsy — derechos constitucionales de la víctima*
Statutory victim rights (OR only)	*Derechos reglamenatrios de la víctima (OR)*
Victim advocate / representative	*Intercesor(a) / representante de la víctima*
Restitution	*Reparación monetaria / indemnización a la víctima*
Right to refuse discovery	*Derecho a oponerse a la divulgación de información personal*
Notification of proceedings	*Notificación de las actuaciones judiciales*
Right to prompt proceedings	*Derecho a la prontitud del proceso judicial*
Privacy protection / confidentiality	*Protección de privacidad / confidencialidad*
Support person	*Persona de apoyo*

Witness immunity — all four states

English Term	Español — Equivalente
Use immunity (all states)	*Inmunidad de uso / inmunidad de declaración*
Transactional immunity (CA/NV/OR; not by statute in AZ)	*Inmunidad transaccional*
Grant of immunity	*Otorgamiento / concesión de inmunidad*
Compelled testimony	*Testimonio forzado por mandato judicial*
Invoke the Fifth Amendment	*Invocar la Quinta Enmienda*
Independent source doctrine	*Doctrina de la fuente independiente*
Contempt of court (refusal to testify)	*Desacato al tribunal por negativa a testificar*
Cooperation agreement / deal	*Acuerdo de cooperación / acuerdo con la fiscalía*
Immunity order (NV: NRS §178.572)	*Orden de inmunidad (NV)*
Grand jury context (OR: ORS §136.617)	*Contexto del gran jurado (OR)*

Child witnesses — all four states

English Term	Español — Equivalente
Closed-circuit television (CCTV) testimony	*Testimonio por circuito cerrado de televisión (CCTV)*
Competency examination / voir dire	*Examen / audiencia de competencia testimonial*
Testimonial competency	*Competencia para testificar*
Truth vs. lie distinction	*Distinción entre la verdad y la mentira*
Forensic interview (recorded; admissible in OR)	*Entrevista forense (grabada; admisible como prueba en OR)*
Age-appropriate questioning	*Preguntas acordes a la edad y nivel de desarrollo*
Child abuse / sexual abuse of a minor	*Abuso o maltrato infantil / abuso sexual de un menor de edad*
Independent / appointed interpreter for child (NV)	*Intérprete designado para el menor (NV: NRS §50.560)*
Support person may not coach or signal	*La persona de apoyo no puede dar instrucciones ni hacer señales*

State statute quick-reference (CA · NV · AZ · OR)

Topic	CA	NV	AZ	OR
Victim rights (Marsy's)	Art. I §28 (2008)	NV: Art. 1 §8A (2018)	Art. II §2.1 (2021)	Statutory only ORS §147.417 (OR rejected Marsy's 2020)
Witness immunity	PC §1324	NRS §178.572	ARS §13-4064 (use immunity only by statute)	ORS §136.617 (grand jury context most common)
CCTV testimony	PC §1347 under 13	NRS §50.560 under 10	ARS §13-4253 under 15	OEC §40.385 (+ recorded forensic interviews admissible)
Support person	PC §868.5	All states — court discretion	Court discretion	ORS §40.385 (must not coach or signal)
Victim notification	PC §679.02	NRS §217.171	ARS §13-4402	ORS §147.421

Oregon note: Oregon admits recorded forensic interviews as substantive evidence (OEC §40.385). You may be asked to interpret a recording rather than live testimony. Confirm your mode before proceedings begin. Also: Oregon's victim rights are not constitutionally protected — the DA enforces them on the victim's behalf, which changes the courtroom dynamics you will observe.