

Department of Justice is reportedly planning to replace in-person interpreters with informative videos at immigration hearings



Hundreds of people overflow onto the sidewalk in a line snaking around the block outside a U.S. immigration office with numerous courtrooms Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019, in San Francisco.

Associated Press/Eric Risberg

- The Department of Justice is planning to replace human interpreters at immigration court hearings with informative videos briefing migrants facing deportation on their rights, [The San Francisco Chronicle](#) reported.
- The "cost-saving" measure was introduced nationally by the DOJ last month and could be put into place as early as mid-July.
- A spokesperson for the Justice Department told INSIDER that there is no specific policy change for using informative videos for "master calendar" hearings, and called the shift "part of an effort to be good stewards" of the limited resources of the Executive Office for Immigration Review.
- Some judges and immigration advocates, however, are concerned about the videos.

The Department of Justice is planning to replace human interpreters at immigration court hearings with informative videos briefing migrants facing deportation on their rights, The [San Francisco Chronicle](#) reported.

The DOJ introduced the switch to immigration judges across the US last month, calling it a "cost-saving measure" for a bogged-down immigration court system, according to The Chronicle. The plan could be implemented as early as mid-July.

The video was proposed as a solution to the issue of "master calendar" hearings, where immigration judges meet with dozens of undocumented immigrants in "rapid succession" to inform them of their rights and obligations and schedule cases, the number of which is close to reaching one million, according to The Chronicle.

A spokesperson for the Justice Department told INSIDER that there is no specific policy change for using informative videos for "master calendar" hearings, which typically only last 10 to 15 minutes. Rather, the shift away from in-person interpreters is "part of an effort to be good stewards" of the limited resources of the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

The video, which would be recorded in multiple languages, would serve a similar purpose: informing immigrants on their rights and the course of the court proceedings. Telephone services will also be used for on-demand translation to migrants, when available.

Some judges and immigration advocates, however, are concerned about the videos.

"It's a disaster in the making," one judge told the Chronicle, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the person did not have approval to talk publicly. "What if you have an individual that speaks an indigenous language and has no education and is completely illiterate? You think showing them a video is going to completely inform them of their rights? How are they supposed to ask questions of the judge?"

Read more: [The American Bar Association is sounding the alarm that US immigration courts are 'on the brink of collapse'](#)

Los Angeles judge Ashley Tabaddor, who is also union president of the National Association of Immigration Judges, told the Chronicle that she believed budget concerns don't justify the shift away from human personnel.

"Interpreter cost is not a surprise cost; it's an integral part of every case," Tabaddor said to the Chronicle. "If they actually look at the [immigration] courts as a real court, they

would never be dismissive of the role of an interpreter. But the fact that we are here and have these budget shortfalls means they have prioritized the budget in a way that is dismissive of the integral role of the interpreters."

Jeffrey Chase, a former immigration judge, said to The Chronicle that he believes the lack of human interpreters could discourage trust in the court system. Chase, who now volunteers for organizations that provide legal assistance to immigrants, is also concerned about due process for immigrants.

"There's no longer concern about the balance," he said. "It's totally efficiency-heavy these days, and I think it's being decided by people who haven't been in the court much and don't understand the consequences."

<https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-officials-replace-human-interpreters-with-videos-at-immigration-hearings-2019-7>