



National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators

1901 Pennsylvania Ave. NW ♦ Suite 804 ♦ Washington, DC 20006
Tel: 202-293-0342 ♦ Fax: 202-293-0495 ♦ www.najit.org

March 27, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

We write on behalf of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) to reiterate our support for the Department of Justice's ongoing initiative to require state judiciary systems to provide interpreters for all parties, witnesses, and victims, and others who come in contact with the courts, regardless of their ability to pay.

NAJIT's mission is to promote and enhance the profession of judicial interpreting and translating as the best way to provide due process and equal access to justice for all persons, regardless of their ability to speak the English language or their country of origin, in accordance with Amendments V, IV, and XIV of the United States Constitution, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 13166, and the policies of the Obama administration. As such, we stand on the side of providing interpreters as part of the regular functions of the judicial system, in the same way that judges, clerks, security staff, and so on, are provided.

The function of the courts is, quite simply, to dispense justice. This is a cornerstone of our system of government. The American justice system, rooted in the concept that all are equal before the law and all should have equal access to the courts, serves as a model to countries the world over. Court interpreters provide a desperately-needed service to the judiciary: placing individuals for whom English is not their first or primary language (limited-English-proficient or LEP individuals) on an equal footing with those for whom it is. Providing interpretation does not constitute preferential treatment. Of course, LEP individuals do benefit from interacting with the courts through a language interpreter, but the benefit lies only in their access to justice, and such access is NAJIT's dearly held mission. Court interpreters fulfill a vital role not only for the LEP individual, but also for the other party to the dispute and for the court itself.

Recently, concerns have been raised that parties to certain civil cases with the financial ability to pay should be required to pay or reimburse the costs of providing interpreter services in those cases. NAJIT considers this view misguided. The role of the judiciary interpreter is to serve the cause of justice by enabling the courts to carry out their mission. Such a mission cannot be fulfilled without qualified, competent interpreters serving as a conduit between the justice system and LEP parties, witnesses, family members, and the public. The only way to guarantee that said interpreters are competent, qualified, and impartial is for the justice system itself to ensure that standards for interpreter competency are followed.

NAJIT recognizes that many of our members are independent contractors who make their living providing interpreting services privately in cases in which a court system does not provide interpreters free of charge. However, NAJIT believes that the profession as a whole is strengthened by judicial

oversight, and that requiring courts to provide the best interpreting services possible will provide more job opportunities for our members, not fewer. Moreover, all members will benefit from increased visibility of the profession in civil courtrooms as well as criminal.

As an organization engaged in promoting the use of qualified interpreters in order to achieve equal access to court systems nationwide, NAJIT wishes to express its support of the Department of Justice's efforts. We look forward to a time when it becomes accepted as a long-established norm that the court systems of each state of these United States provide well-qualified interpreters free of charge to all LEP parties in both criminal and civil matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Cruz", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

NAJIT Board of Directors
Rob Cruz, Chair