



National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators
2002 Summit Blvd., Suite 300
Atlanta, GA 30319
ph: 404-566-4705

The mission of the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) is to serve the professions of interpreting and translation by advocating on behalf of interpreters and translators working for the nation's legal system. Almost a year into the COVID pandemic affecting the U.S. and the world, the NAJIT Board of Directors has received troubling news from different parts of the country about interpreters being doubly victimized either by being exposed to hazardous working conditions, or having their income arbitrarily and drastically reduced by court administrators.

Courts are an integral part of our democratic society and interpreters are the critical link in providing justice for a large segment of the population in our country. Our justice system cannot effectively fulfill a constitutional mandate to protect the rights of those who come before the courts unable to speak or understand the English language without the essential and professional skills of the interpreters and translators who serve the courts.

Professional interpreters study for years to hone their skills and further develop their expertise through continuing education courses and by acquiring professional credentials to provide the courts with the highest degree of excellence when their services are needed. For the most part, these services were traditionally provided in person, but with the onset of the pandemic, interpreting services are being provided--or should be provided --remotely.

The fact that interpreters work from a remote location has created the misperception that their work has somehow become less stressful, or easier, resulting in it being erroneously undervalued by the courts. Remote interpreting is, in fact, much more difficult than in-person interpreting given the very little control interpreters have over the sound quality of all speakers in a proceeding, and the proportionately greater cognitive load (concentration and processing of additional data) imposed on the interpreter which, in turn, results in a higher level of stress for the interpreter.

Furthermore, the shift from in-person to virtual interpreting has placed a technological burden directly on practitioners who must often acquire more powerful computers, headsets, noise-canceling microphones, video platform services, and even adapters to protect their hearing from the ever present risk of acoustic shock. To ensure proper

connectivity, interpreters working remotely are also forced to commit to long-term contracts for high speed internet to provide useful interpreting services.

This recent trend among court administrators to reduce the fees paid to interpreters based solely on the fact that they are working remotely is incongruous with the professional nature of the essential services provided to the courts. Additionally, it imposes an undue hardship on interpreters who make themselves available to the courts when their services are needed, and in doing so must forego any other work opportunities. When interpreters set a minimum fee, it is not based on the time it will take them to travel to a location; but rather because that is the minimum window of time they have set aside for one client, and during which they cannot accept any other work assignment. This is and has always been standard professional practice, and whether interpreting services are rendered in person or remotely does not change the fact that Interpreters must “reserve” a minimum amount of time for each assignment. Lowering the minimum per diem or hourly rate courts are paying contract interpreters forces these interpreters to choose between working in the safety of a remote location, or exposing themselves to possible contagion by working in person. There is also the final option of simply no longer making themselves available to the courts so their livelihood is not further impacted by this pandemic.

Interpreters working for the courts have invested their own money, time and resources to adapt to changing technology demands, and thus remain available for the courts where they provide the vital services required by linguistic minorities coming before the courts and who have a right to effective language access as required by law.

In summary, interpreting remotely places a greater cognitive load on interpreters than interpreting in person. It also requires a greater financial investment in the hardware, technical accessories, and other resources needed to provide quality interpreting services to the courts. Consequently, there is no justification for a reduction in the fees paid to professional interpreters working remotely, and it is unconscionable to place such a financial burden on individual interpreters. **Remote interpreting is a premium service, not a discount service.**

The NAJIT Board of Directors emphatically opposes and discourages any reduction in fees to interpreters currently working remotely for any of the courts in the United States, and supports all efforts by our members and fellow judiciary interpreters to resist any action that would jeopardize their livelihoods.