



National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators
2002 Summit Blvd., Suite 300
Atlanta, GA 30319
Tel: 404-566-4705 ~ www.najit.org

March 5, 2021

Christopher Wray, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
FBI Headquarters
935 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20535-0001

Dear Mr. Wray:

As the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT,) we are greatly concerned by events that reflect negatively on professional interpreters and translators, particularly when the professional qualifications of those alleged to be interpreters and translators are unknown or unsubstantiated.

A recent DOJ Press Release (February 17, 2021) announced that “Liliana Moreno, a Spanish translator hired as a contractor by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in a drug trafficking investigation, appeared today in United States District Court to face federal charges that she intentionally disclosed the investigation and its court-ordered wiretap to the investigation’s target...” This article highlights the unfortunate practice of the Department of Justice, through its various agencies, to relinquish the responsibility of contracting language services to commercial entities, as described in another excerpt from the aforementioned article: “According to the federal complaint unsealed today, Moreno, age 35, of Modesto, California, worked for a private company that contracts with DEA to provide translation services.”

Language services companies are commercial entities that, logically, provide services to their clients for profit. Their need to secure profitable operations within the constraints of their contracts far too often results in the subcontracting of individuals to government agencies such as the DEA, who do not possess the requisite qualifications and credentials to conduct themselves professionally and render a quality product. Even if contracting through a company rather than seeking and contracting qualified interpreters and translators directly, the DOJ remains accountable for the competency of their language services subcontractors and their compliance with a professional code of ethics which certainly includes confidentiality of all work done in any setting, and the disclosure of real or potential conflicts of interest.

Having an external company's subcontractor *promising* "never to disclose any investigative information without authorization and to notify DEA if they have any personal association with a target of an investigation," evidently does not meet the minimum threshold of due diligence on DOJ's part, particularly in light of the highly sensitive and confidential nature of the work conducted by DEA and other similar law enforcement agencies. These agencies must be more vigorously involved in the process of hiring contractors to ensure they are professionals capable of performing the job for which they have been hired with the highest degree of competency, and therefore avoid the lack of quality services and problems exemplified by the Liliana Moreno case.

We strongly urge DOJ to revise its policies regarding the subcontracting of language services through private companies and avoid tacitly endorsing unsound hiring practices when professional language services are required. Companies that subcontract interpreters and translators are entitled to earn a profit, but not by subcontracting unqualified individuals lacking the ethical principles, boundaries, and commitment of professional interpreters and translators.

If NAJIT can provide any assistance or resources to reformulate current DOJ practices when contracting interpreters and translators, we are at your service.

Respectfully,

The NAJIT Board of Directors

Reference: https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndca/pr/interpreter-federal-criminal-investigation-charged-disclosing-investigation-and-court?fbclid=IwAR0jdS_n5_Oe3Dr4GqroaU3JRpylXo2ZgvWr2vAV-zLUpOqPE1fiZYrxYOQ

Sent to:

Stephanie Hinds, Acting United States Attorney
Northern District of California
450 Golden Gate Avenue,
San Francisco, CA 94102

Monty Wilkinson, Acting Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

D. Christopher Evans, Acting Administrator
Drug Enforcement Administration
DEA Headquarters
8701 Morrissette Drive
Springfield, VA 22152

Christopher Wray, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
FBI Headquarters
935 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20535-0001