



National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators
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October 16, 2023

King County District Court
Office of the Presiding Judge
W1034 King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue
Seattle, Washington, 98104

Dear Presiding Judge York,

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT), on behalf of its 1,100+ members, is writing to express deep concern regarding recent changes in the interpreter payment policies of the King County District Court. Our association, founded in 1978, is singular in representing court interpreters, court translators, judicial officers, court administrators, scholars, trainers, as well as interpretation and translation students. We are united by our commitment to advancing the professional contributions of interpreters and translators in legal settings, nurturing their growth, and advocating for best practices that ensure equitable access to justice for communities of speakers with limited English proficiency (LEP).

We have been made aware of the recent reduction in minimum pay for remote interpreting assignments in King County District Court, which has resulted in a significant decrease in compensation for per diem court interpreters. This action is out of step with other courts in Washington and many courts around the nation, where compensation rates for contract interpreters are not decreasing but, in many instances, are increasing.

It is our firm position that maintaining fair and competitive compensation for court interpreters, commensurate with their skills and the demands of their profession, is essential. Such compensation is not only a matter of equity but also crucial for attracting and retaining qualified interpreters, which in turn, directly impacts fair access to justice.

We respectfully recommend that you consider the impacts of the reduction in compensation on the efficient and fair administration of justice. As independent contractors, interpreters rely on the ability to schedule multiple assignments on any given day. Accepting a particular assignment makes them unable to offer their services elsewhere at the same time. The variability of the court environment means that there is always uncertainty as to how long a particular appointment may last. Because this new system does not take into consideration the loss of opportunity per diem interpreters face when an assignment is too short to make sense to accept, especially given that it might be canceled for myriad reasons, there is little incentive for interpreters to commit to court assignments. We believe the lowest rate structure that appropriately balances the risk of lost

opportunities and provides the court with a firm basis to estimate and budget for interpreting expenses is at least a two-hour minimum.

NAJIT respectfully urges the King County District Court to reconsider and rectify the recent changes in interpreter payment policies. We encourage you to collaborate with interpreters and their representatives to find a solution that upholds the principles of fairness and access to justice and affirms the crucial role of interpreters within the legal system.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to a positive resolution that respects the professional status of per diem interpreters and, thus, fosters the court's ability to maintain an adequate supply of qualified interpreters so that it may render effective services to the LEP communities it serves. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
The NAJIT Board of Directors