

Press Release

Interpreters in Region 2 WALKOUT!

In light of the Region's failure to provide any wage increase at all during our current contract negotiations, court interpreters will be taking work action. Region 2 [\[1\]](#) Interpreters will be walking out starting March 11, 2022, as a sign of unity protesting the systematic discrimination they face by their employer while simultaneously fighting for livable wages and fair working conditions. The money is there however, courts refuse to make interpreting a viable profession.

Interpreters are critical to ensuring that all members of our diverse community have meaningful access to justice and receive culturally competent support by providing linguistic services to our limited English proficient Californian in the state courts. They are vital in empowering and listening to victims and survivors of crime, litigants, and are equally necessary to the fulfillment of the rights and dignity of the criminally accused. Our system fails to fulfill on its promise of justice for all when we don't adequately compensate and support our interpreters. It is our immigrant and disabled populations who suffer the most and experience disparate treatment such as longer courtroom waits, denial of interpretation services in civil proceedings, or not receiving regular, thorough communication from their appointed lawyer's.

Courts are working hard to eliminate court interpreting as a viable profession and eviscerate due process for limited English Californians. Currently, staff interpreters earnings in region 2 fall within the the low income level. Low wages for the specialized skill set is discouraging employment and is the root of the interpreter retention problem.

The current economic troubles— rising inflation and high cost of gasoline— has exacerbated the situation. While other court employee units have continuously received wage increases and cost of living adjustments, court interpreters have not. Region 2 court interpreters have not received a raise or cost of living adjustments since 2017. Interpreter pay in the state's courts is far lower than in other sector's that compete for certified interpreters and lags behind salaries of other court professionals with comparable level of education and specialized skill set.

The Governor and Legislature understands the importance interpreters play in social justice and as a demonstration to their commitment to language access in the state courts, they continuously fund a separate budget for interpreter expenditures. State courts receive full interpreter expenditure reimbursement from that budget. Consequently, interpreters are not an

added expense to courts. In the 2021-22 fiscal year (June-June), the Governor and Legislature earmarked \$132 million for reimbursement for language access as well as, set aside an additional \$30 million grant for recruitment of employee interpreters.

Recently, the California Federation of Interpreters (CFI) Local 39000, learned that region 2 courts have over \$14 million combined unspent funds from their 2021-22 annual allocation. That amount is not factoring in the amounts courts have received from the \$30 million interpreter recruitment grant. Additionally, in July, region 2 courts will receive another lump sum to cover interpreter expenses for the new fiscal year. This lump sum will be similar or higher than the previous year.

Low wages have gravely affected recruitment and retention of staff interpreters. Courts refusal to make court interpreting a viable profession demonstrates their lack of commitment and investment in ensuring meaningful access to our limited English proficient community. Fewer interpreters in the courts means reduced meaningful access for everyone: victims, defendants, litigants, witnesses, judges, lawyers, and other justice partners. Interpreters have been met with comments such as “you already make enough” or “we can get an app to do interpreting” from court administration and their counsel.

Professional interpreters don't just speak a foreign language — they have mastered it! Competent interpreting requires the highest level of proficiency in at least two languages, extensive professional training, knowledge of a broad spectrum of specialized subject matter, and cultural understanding. They interpret complex vocabulary, grammatical structure, and elements of specialized and cultural meaning, and transform them into equivalents in another language as they are spoken. They must pass one of the toughest professional certification exams and over half hold a masters degree or higher.

Providing a competitive compensation structure and a professional work environment are indispensable for attracting and retaining enough interpreters to meet the California courts' growing language access needs while maintaining acceptable standards of service. Honoring, valuing, and acknowledging the humanity and expertise of interpreters is the only solution for the courts to fulfill their constitutional and civil rights promises. By doing so, courts will truly fulfill the dignity, rights, and needs of ALL people, especially our immigrant populations.

[1] Region 2 is composed of the following counties: Monterey, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Contra Costa, San Mateo, San Francisco, Alameda, Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Humboldt, Lake, Del Norte, and San Benito