CFI California Federation of Interpreters

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Public Comments at Judicial Council Meeting of 8/23/13

Anabelle Garay, Field Representative

Good morning Chief Justice and Council Members.

I am here to object, on behalf of the California Federation of Interpreters, to Recommendation 2, item G, page 16 of your materials.

This proposal would reduce by $1.73 million the TCIMF allocation that has funded the DV Family law Interpreter project for a decade -- and replace that allocation with funds from the interpreter budget- program 45:45.

This would have the net effect of reducing the overall funding available for interpreter services by $1.73 million.

Given the demand for expansion of interpreter services that's addressed in several items on today's agenda, and the pending Dept. of Justice investigation and recommendations, this is a very poorly considered recommendation.

In fact, the first recommendation in the May 22 DOJ letter was to "refrain from taking any actions to re-allocate appropriations from the 45.45 fund. "

The fact that the 45.45 funds will be spent on interpreter services does not justify this shift in funding. The issue is that by reducing the TCIMF contribution to the DV Family law interpreter program, the Council would in essence be redirecting funds out of 45.45 that would otherwise be available for the expansion of services and for maintaining current demands of the trial courts for interpreter services.

These decisions were made without direct consultation with CFI, the professional
We urge the council to reconsider and reject this recommendation. There is adequate funding in the TCIMF to continue funding the DV Family Law Interpreter Program in the same manner that it has been funded for the past ten years.

Mary Lou Aranguren, CFI Legislative and Politicial Committee

We appreciate recent remarks by the Chief Justice highlighting the need to expand access for California's diverse population and the essential need for interpreter services for LEP court users that is not being met. We also appreciate your call for us to hear each other's concerns and work together to achieve these important goals.

We don't doubt the intentions behind those words. Unfortunately actions by staff, Judicial Council committees, and the AOC and regions are sending interpreters a different message.

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The recommended budget action you have before you today- to reduce overall interpreter funding by $1.73 million-- speaks volumes- and is contrary to the assertion that expanding access is a priority.

The entire 45.45 budget, the surplus, and the TCIMF funding for the Domestic Violence Family Law Interpreter Program- all this funding is needed to expand services to LEP court users and to address interpreter wages and benefits.

I cannot stress enough that until the Department of Justice recommendations are addressed, many LEP parties are denied services every day. Providing meaningful language access also means taking care of the service providers.

As stakeholders- as the 900 people who show up every day to bridge the language gap in our courts- our members are not being taken into account as plans move forward on budget decisions, on spending the surplus, on plans for remote interpreting, and on expanding our services.

Two working groups have been appointed- to create a Statewide Language Access Plan and to recommend how to spend what is now a nearly $17 million dollar surplus- and CFI, the interpreters' representative- does not have a place at the table for these discussions. The message this sends is that the process is not transparent and our expertise and perspectives will not be fairly considered.

An open and inclusive process is essential to any cooperative effort. If that's not available then we have to take our message elsewhere, where it will be heard.

We are all aware that the interpreter budget has been underspent and swept for years and funding redirected, leaving interpreter wages stagnant. Now, more than half of the interpreters in the state- in Los Angeles and the Bay Area counties- are working under an expired contract.

The 600 interpreters working in these regions have received no COLA or pay increase of any kind in six years. Historically, interpreters, who are largely women and minorities, have consistently been treated as outsiders, and less favorably when it comes to wages than other court employees, despite our rare skills and the demand for our services.

We are the only employees who don't have a salary range, and this means that an interpreter with twenty years in a court earns the same salary as a first year interpreter.

It is unreasonable to expect that interpreters would continue to indefinitely accept this decline in real wages without any relief. It is unacceptable for the courts and Judicial Council to continue ignoring this reality, and to continue reducing the funding available for interpreter services. As this process moves forward, we'd like to see actions that show we're being heard. Thank you for your time.