



Judicial Council of California

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INVITATION TO COMMENT

SP26-05

Court Interpreters: Revisions to *Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters*

Invitation to Comment Details

Proposed Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes

None

Proposed Effective Date

January 1, 2027

Proposed by

Court Executives Advisory Committee
Kate Bieker, Chair

Contact

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Action Requested

Review and Submit Comments by August
24, 2026, to invitations@jud.ca.gov

(This proposal has not been approved by the Judicial Council and is not intended to represent the views of the council, its Rules Committee, or its Legislation Committee. It is circulated for comment purposes only.)

Executive Summary and Origin

The annual Budget Act instructs the Judicial Council to set policies and compensation rates for contract court interpreters, not to exceed the rates paid to certified court interpreters in the federal court system. In response to increasing interpreter expenditures and challenges in managing interpreter resources, the Court Executives Advisory Committee (CEAC) recommends revising the *Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters* to promote short- and long-term cost containment measures. These include implementing non-negotiable rates, establishing uniform travel compensation, standardizing contractual obligations for services rendered, and additional revisions to clarify and standardize administrative procedures across the state. To implement the required rate structure, CEAC proposes raising the maximum daily compensation rate for independent contractor interpreters, not to exceed the rate paid to federally certified interpreters, as required by the annual Budget Act.

Background

In February 2000, the Judicial Council approved the *Payment Policies for Contract Court Interpreters*, which set forth uniform policies in several areas of contract court interpreter compensation, including daily compensation rates. Effective July 1, 2000, the daily compensation rate for certified and registered interpreters was set at \$265 for a full day and \$147 for a half day. The daily compensation rate for noncertified and nonregistered interpreters was set at no more than \$175 for a full day and \$92 for a half day.

In August 2007, the Judicial Council approved an increase in the daily compensation rate for certified and registered interpreters to \$282 for a full day and \$156 for a half day. The rates for noncertified and nonregistered interpreters were not increased. A [2007 report](#) to the Judicial Council outlined a regional approach to setting compensation rates. Although the regional approach was intended to allow courts to recommend rates that reflected local markets, this approach affected many courts' ability to attract interpreters. Some courts were unable to match the rates of courts from neighboring counties, which resulted in variation in interpreter availability across counties. As a result, courts were competing with one another to attract interpreters, and the pressures caused by this dynamic led to the review and revision of the policies in 2021.

In March 2021, the Judicial Council approved an increase in the daily compensation rate for certified and registered interpreters to \$350 for a full day and \$175 for a half day, and for noncertified and nonregistered interpreters to \$220 for a full day and \$110 for a half day. The standard rate approach outlined in a [2021 report](#) to the Judicial Council was intended to put courts on an equal footing and diminish competition for interpreter services. Recent increases in interpreter service costs have created conditions similar to those under the 2007 regional compensation model, with courts frequently paying amounts above established rates and, in some cases, above federal rates, or incurring additional travel-related expenses to secure interpreter services.¹ These conditions have contributed to increases in overall statewide interpreter expenditures, creating budget impacts that courts must address within existing funding levels. In January 2025, CEAC established a subcommittee to review, assess, and develop recommendations for the [Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters](#) (Link A) to address the statewide operational impacts of rising court interpreter expenditures.

The Proposal

Consistent with the annual Budget Act, CEAC recommends that the Judicial Council, effective January 1, 2027, adopt revisions to the *Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters* (policy). The proposed revisions aim to address the statewide operational challenges associated with increasing interpreter costs by (1) raising daily compensation rates for contractors while ensuring these rates do not exceed those paid to federally certified interpreters as required by the

¹ A list of the average full-and half-day rates paid to interpreters by region in fiscal year 2024–25 is included in Attachment A.

Budget Act² and (2) establishing a uniform statewide framework so that all courts follow the same administrative procedures and contract terms when procuring interpreter services.

The Court Interpreters Program, funded within the Trial Court Trust Fund, provided an annual allocation for court interpreter expenses of approximately \$135 million for fiscal year (FY) 2025–26. Due to rising costs that exceeded the annual allocation, the Governor’s 2026 May Revision included an additional \$20 million for FY 2026–27 and \$20 million for FY 2027–28 to maintain current levels of interpreter services. Contract interpreter costs are the primary driver of overall cost increases and rose by 19 percent in FY 2024–25 compared to the prior fiscal year.³ For example, per diem expenditures for FY 2024–25 were originally estimated at \$38.4 million, but actual per diem expenditures came in at \$43.6 million; reflecting increased demand for higher compensation rates and the resulting increase in interpreter service costs. The rise in contractor pay has occurred alongside stagnant or declining spending on court employees, resulting in an imbalance. Some court employees are quitting or retiring early and moving to contract interpreting because it is seen as more lucrative.

Recent data show that courts are paying contract interpreters full- and half-day rates that approach, and in some cases exceed, the rates paid to federally certified court interpreters. To address these rising costs and comply with Budget Act requirements, it is necessary to establish a rate not to exceed federal rates to prevent further escalation of contractor compensation and to establish statewide uniformity. This approach will create long-term predictability and stability in expenditures, while also strengthening alignment across all 58 trial courts.

Additionally, the committee is also considering additional cost-containment measures, including expanded use of video remote interpreting (VRI) when appropriate. To ensure responsible stewardship of public funds and consistency with statutory limits, rates paid to contract interpreters should not exceed those paid to federally certified court interpreters.⁴

Further details regarding the proposed revisions to the policy are outlined below.

Applicability

Establish the applicability of the policy to all modes of interpretation, all litigation and event types, and all service delivery methods. The policy does not apply to sign language interpretation, which is currently governed by Evidence Code section 754(i).

² The Budget Act of 2025, provision 18 of item 0250-101-0932, states: “[T]he Judicial Council shall set statewide or regional rates and policies for payment of court interpreters, not to exceed the rate paid to certified interpreters in the federal court system.” This text has appeared in the Budget Act for several years.

³ See [Trial Court Interpreters Program Expenditure Report for Fiscal Year 2024–25](#).

⁴ For the federal court interpreter rates, see the [“Federal Court Interpreters” webpage](#) on the United States Courts website. The federal rates will increase on October 1, 2026.

Compensation rates

- Raise the daily compensation rates to the federal levels to address increased interpreter costs while ensuring compliance with the statutory limit that rates do not exceed those paid to federally certified court interpreters. The proposed maximum compensation rates are listed below. However, the federal rates will increase on October 1, 2026.

Certified/Registered:

- Half day: \$320
- Full day: \$566
- Hourly: \$80

Noncertified/Nonregistered:

- Half day: \$190
- Full day: \$350
- Hourly: \$44

- Remove the “Costs Exceeding Normal Rates” section as the proposed rates are aligned with the maximum allowable compensation rates set forth in the annual Budget Act.
- Clarify instances in which additional rates are not permitted. Specifically, additional rates based on the type of service (e.g., hearing, trial) or for interpretation of multiple language pairs or at multiple locations within the same court on the day of service are not permitted.
- Standardize the payment for interpreters providing services in both certified and uncertified languages. Under these circumstances, the interpreter will be compensated at the certified rate for all languages rendered.

Standardized contracting requirements

- Mandate the use of the standardized Independent Contractor Interpreter Agreement template to ensure statewide consistency in the terms governing contract interpreter services.
- Clarify that interpreters must remain available to the court for the entire contracted period, whether it be a half day, a full day, or hourly.

Half-day and hourly rate structures

- Adjust the half-day rate parameters to remove fixed schedules based on morning and afternoon courts sessions. Payment at the half-day rate applies when services are delivered within any consecutive four-hour period.
- Expand the use of hourly rates beyond video remote interpreting and night sessions. The hourly rate will be paid upon agreement or if the interpreter is required to work additional hours beyond those initially established.

Cancellation fees

- Expand the cancellation fee payment options to include hourly engagements, in addition to half-day and full-day arrangements. For hourly engagements, the court will pay a reasonable estimate of the total fee that would have been incurred.
- Streamline cancellation procedures by removing the court executive officer’s authority to approve cancellation fees exceeding the limits outlined in the policy.

Unavailability

- Establish procedures the court should follow when an interpreter is unavailable. An interpreter is considered unavailable if they cannot provide services on the requested date(s) or are unwilling to accept the maximum compensation rate established in the policy. If, after a diligent search, a certified or registered interpreter is unavailable, a nonregistered or noncertified interpreter may be appointed as outlined in [California Rules of Court, rule 2.893\(e\)](#).

Video remote interpreting

- Incorporate a VRI clause to promote the use of VRI as a tool to expand language access and improve interpreter service delivery statewide. The Judicial Council maintains a list of Limited Telephonic & Remote Interpreter Services vendors to which additional statewide providers may be added.

Business-related travel expenses

- Require a consistent policy application statewide by prohibiting the consolidation of travel and related business expenses into compensation rates.
- Shorten the “Business-Related Travel Expenses” section for overall policy concision. Travel expenses must adhere to, and may not exceed, the limits stated in the [Judicial Council’s Travel and Expense Reimbursement Guidelines \(Contractors\)](#) (Link B) and must be authorized in advance.

Technical and formatting improvements

- Incorporate minor revisions to language and formatting throughout the policy.

The *Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters*, reflecting the revisions recommended above, is attached as Attachment B.

Alternatives Considered

CEAC considered establishing regional compensation rates, but the committee concluded that regional rates would increase administrative burden associated with negotiating rates. Additionally, the regional rate approach established in 2007 made it difficult for courts to attract interpreters when rates were higher in neighboring counties. The pressures caused by this dynamic led to the review and revision of the policy in 2021.

Additionally, CEAC considered not revising the *Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters*. However, due to the statewide operational impacts of rising interpreter payment expenditures, the committee concluded that raising the compensation rates is needed to comply with direction in the Budget Act and to establish statewide consistency when procuring interpreter services.

Fiscal and Operational Impacts

Fiscal impacts

The proposal advocates raising the daily compensation rate for interpreters to the rates paid to those in the federal court system. According to FY 2024–25 data in the Court Interpreter Data Collection System, the average interpreter compensation is already approaching, and in some cases exceeding, the federal rates. When presented to the council, the policy will reflect the new federal rates that take effect on October 1, 2026. The estimated annual cost of aligning council rates with the new federal rates is approximately \$7 million. Additional funding may be needed to support these rate increases.

Due to limited funding, courts must continue to closely monitor their interpreter expenses, including both employee and contractor costs. Recent data also indicates that impacts would vary by language, with some contractors receiving higher rates and others seeing rate reductions where current compensation exceeds the federal rate. See Attachment A for a list of the average full- and half-day rates paid to interpreters by region in FY 2024–25.

The current policy provides courts with the option to negotiate above the daily rate in *extraordinary circumstances*; however, the use of this option varies across the state due to the rising costs of interpreter services. The proposal could provide long-term cost savings by capping the compensation rates at the maximum allowable rates in the Budget Act and establishing a uniform statewide framework under which all courts operate when engaging interpreter services, thus mitigating competition between courts and eliminating negotiations above the maximum rates.

Although the proposed revisions will increase baseline compensation costs, the following measures included in the policy proposal are expected to produce long-term savings, rate predictability, and improve operational efficiency:

- Rate stability resulting from non-negotiable rates capped at the federal rates per the annual Budget Act;
- Uniform travel compensation policies in adherence to the *Judicial Council’s Travel and Expense Reimbursement Guidelines (Contractors)* (Link B);
- Minimized competition between courts for interpreter services resulting from the statewide uniform policy application and contract terms; and
- Expanded use of VRI as an additional tool to promote cost efficiency and expanded access to justice.

Operational impacts

The proposal recommends revisions intended to standardize and clarify administrative procedures, promoting uniform policy application statewide and reducing administrative burden for interpreter coordinators and related staff. The proposal seeks to significantly reduce the

administrative burden associated with negotiating, contracting, monitoring, and maintaining independent contractor interpreter relationships across the state.

To ensure compliance with the updated policy, some courts may need to adjust local practices or amend existing interpreter services contracts. The revised policy is intended to facilitate greater consistency in interpreter service engagements across the state and promote responsible use of public funds while ensuring the language access needs of courts users continue to be met.

Request for Specific Comments

In addition to comments on the proposal as a whole, the advisory committee is interested in comments on the following:

- Does the proposal appropriately address the stated purpose?

The advisory committee also seeks comments from courts on the following cost and implementation matters:

- Would the proposal provide cost savings? If so, please quantify.
- What would the implementation requirements be for courts? Examples include training staff (please identify position and expected hours of training), revising processes and procedures (please describe), changing docket codes in case management systems, or modifying case management systems.
- Would the effective date provide sufficient time for implementation?
- How well would this proposal work in courts of different sizes?

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: FY 2024–25 Average Full-Day and Half-Day Contractor Payments by Language and Region
2. Attachment B: Revised *Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters* (effective date to be determined)
3. Link A: [*Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters*](#) (effective July 1, 2021)
4. Link B: [*Judicial Council's Travel and Expense Reimbursement Guidelines \(Contractors\)*](#)

FY 2024-25 Average Full-Day and Half-Day Contractor Payments by Language and Region

Regions	1		2		3		4	
	Full	Half	Full	Half	Full	Half	Full	Half
Spanish	523	255	601	289	550	303	381	187
Mandarin	522	363	577	436	570	281	574	311
Vietnamese		245	577	288	470	291	731	424
Punjabi	597	429	700	656	465	311	350	219
Cantonese	397	389	365	352	542	273	675	391
Arabic	376	282	525	345	428	241	403	179
Korean	762	387	500	254	363	9	507	284
Russian	487	300	480	259	425	184	470	358
Armenian - Eastern	292	138			363	256	469	208
Farsi (Persian of Iran)	306	249	795	436	563	466	822	347
Tagalog	202	135	689	405	448	378	557	424
Hmong		350			378	136		1
Mixteco	883	588	784	404	616	412		1
Dari (Persian of Afghanistan)	517	362	795	436	499	361	629	253
Lao	333	213	500	325	451	280		1
French	327	160	626	410	535	243	601	260
Thai	333	213	500	327	423	237		1
Hindi	603	417	699	626	477	316	206	204
Mixteco Alto	518	542			616	413		1
Romanian	547	412	723	364	548	420	284	268
Portuguese	700	322	626	341	406	217	463	175
Mixteco Bajo	883	588	446	350	616	411		1
Triqui		350	521	427	411	173		1
Chaldean		350	400	303	363	9	220	107



DRAFT Payment Policies for Independent Contractor Interpreters

I. Purpose

Originally adopted on February 1, 2000, this policy establishes standard compensation rates and payment policies for independent contractor interpreters retained by California trial courts.

II. Authority

The annual Budget Act provides the judicial branch with spending authority to pay independent contractor interpreters to provide services during court proceedings and for services related to pending court proceedings taking place in or outside of a courtroom, including services provided outside of a courthouse.

Through provisional language in the Budget Act, the Legislature requires the judicial branch to establish payment policies and set statewide or regional payment rates that do not exceed the rates paid to certified interpreters in the federal court system.

III. Policy

A. Applicability

These policies apply to all modes of interpretation, all litigation and event types (including all stages of jury trial), all service delivery methods (in-person, video-remote, and telephonic interpreting), and all independent contractor interpreters regardless of procurement method. This policy does not apply to sign language interpretation.

B. Written Agreement

A written agreement, defining the cost, rates, scope of work, and terms and conditions, must be in place between the court and the independent contractor interpreter (hereinafter referred to as “interpreter”) before service is provided. All courts must use the standardized Independent Contractor Interpreter Agreement template to ensure the consistent and uniform application of interpreter payment policies statewide. Any contract that is initiated on or after this policy’s effective date must comply with the new standardized agreement template.

C. Compensation Rates

1. Interpreters will be compensated for services at a half-day, full-day, or hourly rate. Interpreters will be obligated to the court for the entirety of the contracted half-day, full-day, or hourly time. The Independent Contractor Interpreter Agreement outlines the procedures for interpreter to follow if interpreter receives payment from another court during the same half-day or full-day time period as contracted.
 - a. Half-day rate: Paid when services are provided for any portion of a consecutive four-hour period.
 - b. Full-day rate: Paid when services are provided in both a morning and afternoon court session in a single day.
 - c. Hourly rate: Paid when interpreting services are provided by agreement on an hourly

basis, such as for brief assignments or when the interpreter is not available for all hours of a half-day or full-day session. If an interpreter is required to work additional hours beyond those established in a Service Request, as defined in the Independent Contractor Interpreter Agreement, the interpreter is entitled to hourly compensation in addition to other compensation received for the day.

2. In accordance with the annual Budget Act, compensation rates for interpreters will not exceed the rate paid to federally certified court interpreters. The maximum compensation rates are as follows:
 - a. Certified/Registered interpreters
 - Half day: \$320
 - Full day: \$566
 - Hourly: \$80
 - b. Noncertified/Nonregistered interpreters (provisionally qualified ([Cal. Rules of Court, rule 2.893](#)))
 - Half day: \$190
 - Full day: \$350
 - Hourly: \$44
 - c. Rates for interpreters who are certified in one or more languages and also provide noncertified interpretation in one or more languages will be paid at the certified rate for all languages.
 - d. Additional rates based on the type of service (e.g., hearing, trial) or for interpretation of multiple language pairs in the day of service are not permitted.

D. Cancellation Fee

1. A cancellation fee, not to exceed the half-day or full-day compensation rates included in this policy or a reasonable estimate of the total fee the court would have paid for an hourly engagement will be paid if the court entered into an agreement with an interpreter more than 24 hours or one business day in advance of the assignment and either of the following occurs:
 - The court cancels the assignment with less than 24 hours' notice.
 - The court cancels an assignment that begins on the first business day of the workweek without one business day's notice.
2. Paying a cancellation fee under any other circumstances is not permitted.
3. The rate and terms of paying a cancellation fee are included in the Independent Contractor Interpreter Agreement.

E. Business-Related Travel Expenses

Business-related travel expenses may be reimbursed for interpreter travel to and from an assignment, as follows:

1. Transportation, lodging, and meal and incidental expenses must adhere to, and may not exceed, the limits stated in the [Judicial Council's Travel and Expense Reimbursement Guidelines \(Contractors\)](#) and must be authorized in a Service Request. Travel and related business expenses will not exceed established per diem rates nor be lumped into compensation rates.
2. The reimbursement of travel expenses, including mileage and travel time, is addressed in the Independent Contractor Interpreter Agreement.
3. The court will not pay travel expenses, other than mileage, that are not specifically authorized in a Service Request.

F. Unavailability

For the purposes of this policy, an interpreter who is unable to provide services to the court on the requested date(s) and/or unwilling to accept the applicable maximum compensation rate, established herein, is considered unavailable.

1. The court must follow [California Rules of Court, rule 2.893](#) when a certified or registered interpreter is unavailable.

G. Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

VRI may be performed by a certified, registered, or provisionally qualified interpreter.

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