



January 31, 2010

Dear Legislator:

The Washington State Court Interpreters and Translators Society (WITS) was founded in 1988 with the goals of improving the delivery of language services in the judicial setting and working for the good of language professionals. Today we have members who work in around 50 languages, and who live and work in every region of the state. Most of our members are freelancers who practice in various language-related fields, including medical interpreting, court interpreting, and many others. Most of our colleagues practice more than one such discipline.

We are alarmed to see that the Governor's budget still cuts funding for interpreters for Medicaid clients. Such a cut would mean the end of the road for many hardworking interpreters, as well as the loss of federal matching funds. But more importantly, it would mean the loss of meaningful health care for thousands of limited-English-proficient patients.

The DSHS interpreter program was born of a lawsuit, and Washington can ill afford another lawsuit forcing it to go back to doing what it was supposed to do in the first place: provide equal access without regard for race or national origin.

We know that there are bills in the legislature now, HB3062 and SB6726, that seek to establish a working group to fix the inefficient DSHS broker model. WITS does not adopt a position on these bills because they include collective bargaining, and we express no position on that point. However, we do support taking a good, hard look at the way language services are provided to DSHS clients, and we are ready to assist in this effort. The stakeholder workgroup contemplated in this legislation may do worlds of good in this regard.

Let us streamline and improve the system, not do away with it entirely. Too many people's health and welfare hang in the balance.

Yours truly,

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