



May 1, 2011

James R. Larsen, District Court Executive
U.S. District Court
P.O. Box 1493
Spokane, WA 99210

Dear Mr. Larsen,

We were dismayed to learn that interpreter rates for work with panel attorneys in the Eastern District of Washington have been cut drastically. Bruce Anderson's email indicates that interpreters will no longer be paid for blocks of time for these encounters. On further clarification, Mr. Anderson informed me that a one-hour minimum will still apply. This change represents approximately a 70% cut in the minimum fee.

The Administrative Office for the United States Courts sets rates for certified, professionally qualified, and language skilled interpreters working in United States District Courts. All these rates are based on a half-day, full-day structure.

There is a clear reason for this. A responsible interpreter can generally only take two assignments a day—one in the morning, and one in the afternoon. This is due to the unpredictable nature of court proceedings and correctional facilities. We cannot run the risk of keeping a federal judge, attorneys, and parties waiting by overbooking ourselves and taking four or five assignments a day, even if that many assignments were available.

In Mr. Anderson's reply to my inquiries, he also indicated that other federal court entities will continue to pay as before. This is good, of course, but it raises an interesting problem. It now appears that work with panel attorneys is somehow considered less valuable to the court than work with public defenders, probation, or other entities. We submit that panel attorneys, and above all their limited-English-proficient clients, would likely disagree with this sentiment.

Federal court interpreter certification is currently available only in Spanish, because the overwhelming majority of interpreter matters in United States District Courts require a Spanish language interpreter. This credential is difficult in the extreme to obtain, as illustrated by the fact that in the Eastern District of Washington, only three interpreters hold this certification, and only fourteen in the entire state.

These interpreters are in high demand because they hold the highest credential available in the field. They are able to negotiate a good rate in many venues of interpretation and translation, and as freelancers, they work for a wide variety of clients in the private and

public sectors. A one-hour minimum structure will likely be less than attractive to them, particularly when other entities regularly pay better.

Though federally certified Spanish court interpreters are the most in-demand interpreters for United States District Courts, the same issues apply to interpreters of many other languages as well. By way of illustration, the State of Washington has only thirteen certified Vietnamese court interpreters, and only two registered Punjabi court interpreters. These figures are not atypical; a visit to the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts' web site reveals that there are few credentialed interpreters available for almost any given language.

We are acutely aware that the economy is terrible. This has affected us freelancers more severely than most other sectors. We recognize, therefore, the need to make cuts and tighten belts. But we would urge you to consider some other measure besides a 70% reduction in the minimum fee for these important attorney-client meetings.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kenneth Barger', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kenneth Barger
Advocacy Chair, Washington State Court Interpreters and Translators Society

Copy: Hon. Richard C. Tallman, Circuit Judge
Bruce Anderson, Court Services Supervisor
WITS President Barbara Robinson
WITS board of Directors