

July 13, 2023

California State Senate  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 3240  
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Chair Umberg and Vice Chair Wilk,

I am writing in my capacity as president of the American Translators Association (ATA), the largest professional association of interpreters and translators in the United States with more than 8,500 members working in over 50 languages.

More than 3,000 of our members are professional interpreters, and we have more than 700 members in California.

I am writing as a follow-up to my letter dated May 4, 2023 to the Assembly Committee on Judiciary and Assemblymember Fong to reiterate our concerns about AB 432, the Court Interpreters Workforce Pilot Program bill, which will be before you soon. The amendments made to the bill on June 26, 2023 did not address the concerns that we raised in that letter, and therefore, we must oppose AB 432.

On its face, the creation of additional pathways to full-time employment for aspiring court interpreters in California's courts is a good thing. However, the pilot program put forth in this bill ignores the underlying reality about why the courts have had trouble attracting qualified applicants: the salaries and fees offered are lower than what interpreters earn in other settings, where their skills are more highly valued. As evidenced by the number of certified and registered court interpreters in California's state registry, there isn't a lack of qualified talent.

The bill threatens to degrade the quality of language access in the courts and could have unintended consequences in other settings where professional interpreters are required by law. As a professional association representing thousands of interpreters who work in legal, healthcare, educational, community, and conference settings, our interest lies in advocating on behalf of *all* our interpreter members and the people they serve in California and the rest of the nation. The rest of the country looks to California to set the bar, and the repercussions of this legislation would be far-ranging and potentially very negative.

The California State Legislature would do well to rectify the real issue underlying this perceived lack of talent rather than trying to reinvent the wheel with an untried and untested pilot program. This program risks lowering the standard for court interpreters and putting the most vulnerable participants in our judicial system at greater risk of discrimination and miscarriages of justice.

Updating compensation would be a much more impactful and cost-effective way to achieve the ultimate goal of AB 432: to increase qualified interpreters in the courts to satisfy the language access needs of limited English proficient (LEP) participants. Other solutions we offered in our May 2023 letter included offering more exam sittings, reimbursing candidates for expenses incurred to train for and take said exams, and partnering with existing training programs within the state university system and private institutions across California.

We ask that you and your colleagues **oppose AB 432** so its authors can address the issue with a broader coalition of the stakeholders who will potentially be affected, including certified and registered interpreters, LEP advocates, interpreter trainers, and others. By working openly and in consultation with these stakeholders, you will be able to craft legislation that successfully improves the working conditions and compensation of interpreters across California and protects LEP individuals' civil right to meaningful language access.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information or if I can put you in touch with court-certified interpreters in California who would be willing to share their input on this bill and the actionable alternatives.

Respectfully,



Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo  
President, American Translators Association

cc:

Assemblymember Mike Fong  
Assemblymember Ash Kalra  
Assemblymember Blanca Pacheco