

August 8, 2023

Hon. Donald W. Beatty  
Chief Justice  
South Carolina Supreme Court  
1231 Gervais Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Chief Justice Beatty:

As a follow up to the letter we sent you on February 27, 2023, we are writing again to express our support for Senate Bill 52 (S. 52) amending the South Carolina Code of Laws to fix judicial salaries in the Palmetto State to the level of compensation received by federal district court judges.<sup>1</sup> In tandem, we would like to offer a suggestion that you consider linking state interpreter fees to those being paid to federal court interpreters. If you were to add the salaries of four more judges on your payroll, you could afford to pay federal rates to all court interpreters across the Palmetto State. Plus, you would include in a compensation policy consistent with the judiciary what is likely the most diverse worker class of the courts.

South Carolina Senate Bill 52 is a step in the right direction. Indeed, the federal judiciary sets a benchmark of both quality and compensation, and South Carolina should seek to place its judiciary on par. Moreover, the proper adjustment of salaries has implications far beyond fairness to individual judges. For example, if salaries are too low, only those with means will be financially able to assume a judicial post. This will negatively impact the diversity of the judiciary and discriminate against those who are well qualified and interested in serving, but nonetheless unable to aspire to a career in the judiciary because of financial hardship from unfair compensation. We believe this same principle ought to be applied to the compensation levels for court interpreters in South Carolina as well. In doing so, the South Carolina judiciary would be treating court interpreters as it would its judges.

Federally certified court interpreters who work on a freelance basis for the US district courts and other federal agencies receive \$566 for a full day and \$320 for a half day,<sup>2</sup> as set forth by the Administrative Office of the United State Courts,<sup>3</sup> which assures them a \$320 minimum for reserving their time for the scheduled assignment(s). The minimum for South Carolina court

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<sup>1</sup> [S. 52](#) of the South Carolina General Assembly, 125th Session (2023-2024).

<sup>2</sup> As a reference, the federal courts value staff court interpreters with the same paygrade as law clerks, which is set above court reporters and court clerks: [JSP-14, \\$118,521–\\$154,074](#) a year, Charlotte-Concord, NC-SC.

<sup>3</sup> [Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts: Federal Court Interpreters](#) (2023).

interpreters is \$160 for sign-language interpreters<sup>4</sup> and \$130 for spoken-language interpreters<sup>5</sup>, which is about half and less than half, respectively, of the federal compensation standard.

Moreover, the federal judiciary does not parse the per-diem rates for freelance court interpreters, as does the South Carolina courts' policy and procedure guide for court interpreters.<sup>6</sup> Imagine if S. 52 had an amendment establishing that judges be paid from the time that all parties are present for a case. That would be unfair to the South Carolina judiciary, and it is unfair to its court interpreters. The federal courts have also established cancellation fees set at half-, full- and two-day minimums, depending on the scheduled assignment(s), as well as payment for travel time and expenses.<sup>7</sup> The federal judiciary sets a benchmark of both quality and compensation, and the South Carolina courts should seek to place their interpreters on par, just as S. 52 proposes to do for its judges.

By investing in language access resources to the same degree as federal courts, the South Carolina judiciary would also enhance its achievements in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as most court interpreters are women and/or immigrants providing language access for limited English proficient (LEP) litigants, which comprises Deaf Americans, hard of hearing Americans, and immigrant Americans.

Thank you very much for considering our input. We wish you the very best as you seek the course of action that will best benefit your courts, the LEP community you serve, and the professionals on whom you rely. If there is any further assistance we might provide, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,



Madalena Sánchez Zampaulo  
President, American Translators Association

cc:

Luke A. Rankin, chairman of the South Carolina Senate Judiciary Committee  
Gerald Malloy, member of the South Carolina Senate Judiciary Committee

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<sup>4</sup> Order of the Supreme Court of South Carolina (March, 2023). [Re: Appointment of Qualified Court Interpreters for Deaf Persons and Payment for their Services.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Order of the Supreme Court of South Carolina (March, 2023). [Re: Appointment of Qualified Court Interpreters for Non-English-Speaking Persons and Payment for their Services.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Court interpreters In South Carolina Courts: A policy and procedure guide, v. II](#), p. 30 (2020).

<sup>7</sup> United States Courts, [Purchase Order for Court Interpreter Services – Terms and Conditions.](#)