

June 30, 2023

Re: OPPOSED AB 1032 (Pacheco)
To: California Senate Judiciary Committee

We are indigenous Mayan-language relay and direct interpreters who have been providing interpretation services to the Superior Courts of California in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Central Valley and even Southern California for many years.

We recently learned about a bill in the California Legislature- AB 1032 - that will affect our communities and livelihoods significantly.

Working indigenous-language interpreters throughout the state were not consulted about this bill, and neither were the communities we serve. We are concerned that some in our communities are being misinformed about what these bills do, and have been promised things that the bill cannot deliver, such as access to health benefits and full time positions. Moreover, the negative impacts of this bill for language access have not been considered.

AB 1032 aims to restrict contractor use in the Superior Courts of California. Many interpreters in our languages who freelance for the courts and are not yet registered will only be allowed to work for 45 days. After that, relay interpreters would have to become pro tem employees and unregistered direct interpreters could not work at all. Yet the bill contains no provisions to guarantee positions with benefits and only states the pay will be "higher" than full-time interpreter daily rates. Currently, as freelance interpreters, we negotiate rates well above the standard per diem set by the Judicial Council. As such, our livelihoods would be severely impacted, and rather than work for the courts, we would offer our services elsewhere in the community, the federal and immigration courts, and the private sector. The state courts cannot afford to lose any portion of the limited workforce of indigenous language interpreters who have received training in legal interpreting.

This bill would also legitimize the ongoing use of untested interpreters in indigenous languages and thus represents a step backward for language access and would institutionalize unequal treatment of the communities we serve. As currently proposed, AB 1032 would allow untested relay interpreters to be offered employment, while non-registered interpreters working directly into English would not be eligible for employment.

We want our communities to have professional interpretation services, like all others. Why lower standards just for our languages? We have been trained as legal interpreters and are working toward becoming registered. Direct interpreters would be at a distinct disadvantage under the terms of this bill, both working as non-registered interpreters and once registered. Relay and direct interpreters currently contract with the courts. Why divide us? Why not encourage direct interpreters to become registered and provide funding for that? Why not create tests for Relay Interpreters in Spanish so that they too can become registered? Why force interpreters into an employment position with no guarantee of work or benefits?

We are really concerned about the impact AB 1032 will have on working interpreters and the communities we serve. Please oppose AB 1032.

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