

March 20, 2013

Dear members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee for Public Safety,

Thank you for allowing me to take the time to share my perspective.

As I launched into my full time career as an interpreter and translator, I realized I had to think of it as a small business person if I was going to succeed. I had to evaluate the profitability of each aspect of my business, and if they were not profitable enough, I would have to focus on other aspects of the business I love.

Interpreting is a prestigious occupation. In Oregon, the overall passing rate for the oral exam is 19%ⁱ. This is after applicants have passed the written exam. People prepare for this for years. The level of bilingualism required to be an interpreter is at the ACTFL Superior level, which is the equivalent of someone who acquired a college education immersed in the foreign language as well as in English.

As I studied the situation of Oregon Court Interpreters and asked questions about the rate, I eventually learned that it was \$32.50/hour, established in 1995 and not adjusted for inflation. I calculated that if an interpreter accepted as many appointments as logistically possible the maximum annual income would be \$30,000/year. A full time contract court interpreter qualifies for low income housing in Portland at the current ratesⁱⁱ. If we adjust the rates to \$50/hour, minimum two hours, which would account for the inflation of the last 18 years, the maximum annual income will be \$46,000 and they will still qualify for low income housing in the Portland area.ⁱⁱⁱ The adjustment that we are requesting is not overly generous, and it is overdue. Please include an automatic inflationary adjustment in the new rate to keep the rates fair.

If very competent interpreters can not afford to work for the state courts, eventually there will not be competent interpreters consistently available. When Court Interpreting Certification was instituted in Oregon, the intention was to match the rates paid for the federal courts, to signal the high priority of this service. We should return to this, so interpreters can afford to make interpreting in the Oregon courts a high priority again.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours,



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ⁱ <http://courts.oregon.gov/OJD/OSCA/cpsd/InterpreterServices/pages/faq.aspx#FAQ8>

ⁱⁱ Median income percentages issued by HUD. See <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/phb/article/425966>