



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

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September 26, 2019

Hon. Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, California 95814

Subject: Assembly Bill 253 (Stone), as amended September 3, 2019 – Support if amended

Dear Governor Newsom:

The Judicial Council supports AB 253 if amended to permit the expansion of the remote court reporting pilot to increase access and improve working conditions and if the statewide permanent prohibition of additional use is removed.

As drafted, the bill prohibits California trial courts from utilizing remote court reporting to make the record of any court proceedings, and prohibits the courts from expending funds to purchase equipment or software to facilitate the use of remote court reporting. It defines remote court reporting as the use of a stenographic reporter who is not present in the courtroom to produce a verbatim record of court proceedings that are transmitted by audiovisual means to the reporter. The bill authorizes the Santa Clara Superior Court to conduct a pilot project to study the potential use of remote court reporting to make the verbatim record of certain court proceedings, as specified.

Remote court reporting technology is of particular interest in courts with court operations in locations where distance or inclement weather hinder or prevent travel, and in courts struggling to provide access to residents in rural and underserved communities. Courts are currently

working to expand remote appearances throughout the state and video remote court reporting has been utilized in limited instances, as well. For example, in one northern California court, the judge was presiding at the courthouse and the court reporter was snowed in at another court facility with the parties. By allowing the hearing to proceed with the parties and court reporter in one location and the judge in another, the parties and the court reporter avoided travel in dangerous conditions, the litigants were not turned away from court, and the hearing did not require rescheduling. Another example where remote reporting could be utilized is in Mendocino where the branch courthouse in Fort Bragg is more than 90 minutes from the main courthouse in Ukiah. The court estimates \$50,000 in savings over two years could be achieved by eliminating the need to contract with pro tem reporters for short hearings in Fort Bragg. Video remote reporting would allow all reporting to be handled by existing staff reporters in Ukiah.

Expanding the use of remote court reporting would help courts fill in gaps and provide court reporting coverage in branch locations and areas of the state where court reporters are not available. AB 253 would eliminate these opportunities for all courts except Santa Clara, and Santa Clara would likewise be barred from remote court reporting after the termination of the pilot project on or before December 31, 2020.

For these reasons, the Judicial Council supports AB 253, if amended.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact me at 916-323-3121.

Sincerely,

Mailed on September 26, 2019

Cory T. Jaspersen
Director, Governmental Affairs

CTJ/AL/yc-s

cc: Hon. Mark Stone, Member of the Assembly

Ms. Michelle Castro, Director of Government Relations, Service Employees International Union

Mr. Anthony Williams, Legislative Affairs Secretary, Office of the Governor

Mr. Martin Hoshino, Administrative Director, Judicial Council of California