

JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
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Report

TO: Members of the Judicial Council

FROM: Court Interpreters Advisory Panel
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DATE: September 14, 2009

SUBJECT: Court Interpreters: Certification and Registration Testing Fees
(Action Required)

Issue Statement

Government Code section 68562(f) mandates that the Judicial Council “shall establish guidelines for fees or shall set and charge fees for applications to take the court interpreter examinations” Court interpreter certification and registration testing fees were last set in 1994 and have not changed since that time. Candidate fees are paid directly to the test administrator and are used to help offset the cost of administering the exams.

The Court Interpreters Program (CIP) of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) subsidizes roughly one-third of the administrative cost of every certification and registration examination taken, by paying the vendor additional fees on top of the fees paid by candidates. It is no longer realistic, nor is it a best practice, for CIP to continue to subsidize the cost of test administration at the expense of other fundamental testing program needs essential to the integrity and success of the program, such as test development, test maintenance, rater training, and candidate training.

Recommendations

The Court Interpreters Advisory Panel recommends that the Judicial Council approve the following policy changes:

1. Require court interpreter certification and registration test candidates to pay the full and actual cost for the administration of oral and written examinations, based on

current competitive market rates. Candidates will be required to pay separately for each exam taken (written and oral), at the actual market rate of each exam. This fee structure shall not become effective until a new agreement is established between the AOC and the test administrator. The CIP anticipates a new agreement will be established in the spring of 2010.

2. Delegate authority to the Administrative Director of the Courts to set court interpreter certification and registration examination fees, effective immediately. The Administrative Director of the Courts should set certification and registration testing fees based on the current market cost for the administration of these examinations.

Rationale for Recommendations

Full cost of certification and registration exams

Currently court interpreter testing is done through the award of a contract to the testing vendor, with payment for specific test administration deliverables, including the estimated number of tests that will be administered. As a result, roughly one third of test administration costs are subsidized by the AOC. Due to the growing number of candidates and the high rate of repeat test takers, it appears that candidate applications may well surpass the number of tests that can be supported this year. Candidates will then have to be turned away despite the state's critical need for qualified interpreters. Court interpreter certification test candidates currently pay \$250, while the total cost of the certification examination under our current contract is \$355. Court interpreter registration test candidates currently pay \$100, while the total cost of the registration examination under our current contract is \$150. The difference is paid by the AOC through our contract with the test administrator.

Continuing to subsidize certification and registration examinations is fiscally unsustainable due to the ever-increasing number of test takers and testing attempts. Court interpreter testing fees have not increased in 14 years and now cover only roughly two-thirds of test administration. Between the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008, the testing program experienced a 30 percent increase in demand. Subsidizing the examinations has encouraged candidates to take the exams repeatedly without additional preparation. This has resulted in testing funds being spent primarily on failed test attempts. In addition, repeated test taking results in over exposure to the exams and the need to develop multiple versions of exams, which is very costly.

Furthermore, testing program funds are needed to develop and maintain test instruments, to provide regular test rater training, and to offer test preparation and skills-building for candidates to increase testing success. Test preparation is vital to improving test performance and pass rates, and is a better investment than the subsidizing of exams for repeat test takers.

Delegation of authority

The delegation of authority to the Administrative Director of the Courts to set court interpreter certification and registration testing fees would allow the AOC to administer this operational aspect of the Court Interpreters Program without burdening the Judicial Council every time there is a market rate price fluctuation. The Judicial Council has already delegated authority to the Administrative Director of the Courts to handle other similar operational-level decisions such as the setting of interpreter renewal fees. Delegating the authority to set certification and registration testing fees would be fully consistent with previous delegations.

Comments From Interested Parties

The Court Interpreters Advisory Panel includes the perspectives of all key stakeholder groups, including a majority representation of court interpreters. This policy recommendation was approved unanimously by the panel. Comments on these recommendations were not solicited or received from outside parties.

Implementation Requirements and Costs

These recommendations have no implementation costs other than minor administrative costs to communicate the policy change to test candidates. The change in policy will free up funds to dedicate to other more productive and essential aspects of the testing program.