

Proposal for Increased Pay Rates for Cook County Court Interpreters

- Good afternoon, my name is Jose Rochel. I'm here representing the Chicago News Guild (TNG-CWA Local 34071), which advocates for court interpreters in Cook County.”
- I am writing to seek your support in securing an increased pay rate to attract and retain skilled court interpreters, which is crucial for the efficiency of our judicial system.”

Our Current Situation

- “Interpreter services are being **stretched thin**. The Office of Interpreter Services in Cook County provides services throughout our court system, and we are the second-largest county in the country with the most interpreter cases.”
- “This Past month, we handle over **6429 Spanish cases and 221 polish cases** with our current staff, who are doing everything possible to meet the demand.”
- Over the past few years, we've experienced a **50% increase** in the demand for interpreter services. Due to the refugees that are involved in our court system. The workloads have doubled, and unfortunately, many courtrooms are left without interpreters.”
- “To fill the gap, judges, attorneys, sheriffs, clerks, and even family members are stepping in. This impacts the quality of interpretation, which could affect the fairness of proceedings.”

Staffing & Recruitment Challenges

- “Despite posting job openings since 2022, the low pay rate discourages many potential applicants who prefer opportunities in other counties or federal immigration courts that offer better pay.”
- “Currently, we have 8 session interpreters on our roster who work minimal hours due to higher-paying opportunities elsewhere. And from our previous team of 32 full-time interpreters, we're actually now down to 19 full time court interpreters to service all 6 judicial districts in the Cook county area.
- There is in existence an agency called Ready Made that was given an 8-year contract, by The Cook County Government on 11/04/2022 Contract # 2112-09202 Purchase Order No. 70000263209 and the office of the chief judge will be using this agency as a subcontract that will make an impact on our members wages, this agency is paying their interpreters \$69.00 an hour, which is unfair to our current staff.

Call for Advocacy

- “Given these pressures, we require your advocacy. An increase in pay is essential to address this crisis, retain our current interpreters, and attract new talent.”

Proposed Pay Increases

- “We propose raising the hourly pay to **\$65 for certified interpreters** and **\$55 for non-certified interpreters**. This increase will address the staffing crisis and allow us to attract new talent.” We have sent to all cook county commissioners our proposal via email for your consideration. (See Attached Proposal)

Rationale for the Increase

- **Expertise:** “Certified interpreters undergo rigorous training and play a critical role in legal proceedings. Non-certified interpreters also provide essential support, and both categories deserve fair compensation.”
- **Competitiveness:** “Currently, Cook County's pay lags behind regional and national standards. Increasing the pay will align us with comparable jurisdictions and ensure we retain our skilled professionals.”

Support with Data:

Regional & National Comparisons

- “Our proposed rates of \$65 and \$55 per hour are competitive when you consider the growing demands and the higher cost of living in Cook County.” And it aligns to other states like, Wisconsin, Indiana, California and including federal courts though out the nation.

Cost of Living Pressures

- “The rising cost of living in Cook County has made it difficult for interpreters to stay in these positions without better compensation. The proposed rates will help mitigate this challenge.”

Impact of Current Pay

- “Currently, many courtrooms are left without interpreters due to understaffing, which affects the quality and fairness of proceedings. We need to ensure that our courts are properly staffed with qualified professionals.

“Thank you again for your attention and consideration. We look forward to your support in this matter.