

Proposal to Increase Pay Rates for Court Interpreters in Cook County Courts

To: Office of the Chief Judge, Cook County

From: Chicago News Guild (TNG-CWA Local 34071 for Cook County Court Interpreters

Date:

Subject: Proposal for Increased Pay Rates, and Collective Bargaining Agreement Ratification

Introduction

Court interpreters are integral to the Cook County judicial system, ensuring that non-English-speaking residents have equitable access to justice. However, the current pay structure for these professionals does not reflect the increasing demand for their services nor the level of expertise required. We propose raising the hourly pay for court interpreters to \$65.00 per hour for certified interpreters and \$55.00 per hour for non-certified interpreters. Finally, we request that the existing Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) be ratified to formalize these changes and strengthen protections for interpreters.

Rationale for Pay Increase

1. **Rising Demand for Interpreter Services** The demand for qualified court interpreters has increased dramatically due to the growing linguistic diversity in Cook County. The current pay rates do not adequately reflect this rising demand, leading to challenges in attracting and retaining skilled professionals. By raising the pay rates, the county can better meet the needs of the courts and the communities they serve.
2. **High Level of Expertise and Responsibilities** Certified court interpreters possess specialized skills and are held to rigorous certification standards, which enable them to perform their duties in high-stakes legal proceedings. Non-certified interpreters also play essential roles in supporting the court system. Both categories of interpreters deserve compensation that reflects the vital services they provide in ensuring equitable access to the legal system.
3. **Aligning with Regional and National Standards** Pay for court interpreters in Cook County currently lags behind federal rates and those of neighboring jurisdictions. Certified interpreters in federal courts earn around \$59.00 per hour, and bringing Cook County's pay rates to \$65.00 per hour for certified interpreters and \$55.00 per hour for non-certified interpreters will help the county remain competitive in recruiting and retaining top talent.
4. **Cost of Living Increases** The rising cost of living in Cook County has put additional financial pressures on interpreters, many of whom have not seen a pay increase in several years. The proposed raise will allow interpreters to manage these increasing costs while continuing to provide high-quality services to the courts.

Ratification of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)

We also propose that these pay increases and the grade upgrade be ratified through the existing Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) to ensure that the terms are formalized and enforceable. Ratifying the CBA will provide interpreters with the necessary protections, guarantee fair working conditions, and solidify the agreed-upon pay structure moving forward.

Ratification of the CBA will:

- Ensure long-term stability and transparency in pay rates.
- Provide a formalized process for addressing interpreter concerns.
- Strengthen the professional standing of Cook County court interpreters within the judicial system.

We respectfully request that the Office of the Chief Judge adopt the following changes:

1. Increase the hourly pay rates from **\$41.82 to \$65.00** for certified court interpreters and from **\$34.125 to \$55.00** for non-certified court interpreters.
2. **Ratify the existing Collective Bargaining Agreement** to formalize these changes and provide long-term stability for court interpreters.

These proposals are essential to ensure that the Cook County courts can continue to attract and retain qualified interpreters, provide fair compensation to long-serving professionals, and solidify protections under the CBA. We look forward to discussing these proposals further and working with your office to implement them.

Attached is our survey of court interpreter pay rates across various states, counties, and federal agencies in the U.S. to provide context for the proposed rates in Cook County:

1. Federal Courts

- **Certified interpreters:** Approximately **\$59 per hour**.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Around **\$42 per hour**.

Federal courts are often seen as the benchmark for interpreter pay. Certified interpreters working for federal courts are compensated at a higher rate due to the complexity and sensitivity of federal cases.

2. California

- **Certified interpreters:** Pay varies significantly, but **\$75 to \$85 per hour** is common, particularly in urban areas like Los Angeles and San Francisco.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Typically earn around **\$50 to \$60 per hour**.

California offers some of the highest pay rates for court interpreters due to the large population and high demand for multilingual services.

3. New York State

- **Certified interpreters:** Approximately **\$60 to \$70 per hour**.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Around **\$40 to \$50 per hour**.

Interpreters in New York State are compensated well, particularly in the New York City area, where demand is high due to the diverse population.

4. Florida

- **Certified interpreters:** Typically, **\$50 to \$60 per hour**.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Around **\$30 to \$45 per hour**.

Florida's pay rates for court interpreters are competitive but generally lower than those in California and New York.

5. Texas

- **Certified interpreters:** Pay rates in larger cities like Houston and Dallas range from **\$45 to \$65 per hour**.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Earn approximately **\$30 to \$45 per hour**.

Texas offers moderate compensation, but it varies based on the region and court system.

6. Washington State

- **Certified interpreters:** Earn **\$50 to \$65 per hour**.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Around **\$35 to \$50 per hour**.

Washington State courts offer competitive rates, especially in cities like Seattle where there is significant demand.

7. Indiana

- **Certified interpreters:** Typically earn around **\$40 to \$55 per hour**, depending on the county.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Earn approximately **\$25 to \$40 per hour**.

Indiana's rates are lower than the proposed rates for Cook County. The state tends to have a lower cost of living, and the demand for interpreters is less concentrated compared to urban areas like Chicago.

8. Michigan

- **Certified interpreters:** Pay rates vary but generally range from **\$45 to \$65 per hour**, especially in urban centers like Detroit and Grand Rapids.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Earn **\$30 to \$45 per hour**.

Michigan’s rates for certified interpreters align closely with Cook County’s proposed **\$55 per hour**, particularly in larger cities with higher demand.

9. Wisconsin

- **Certified interpreters:** Typically earn between **\$40 and \$60 per hour**, with higher rates in Milwaukee and Madison.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Generally, earn **\$30 to \$45 per hour**.

Wisconsin’s rates are similar to Cook County’s proposed rates, though Cook County would be at the higher end for certified interpreters, making the proposed pay competitive.

10. Minnesota

- **Certified interpreters:** Earn around **\$50 to \$70 per hour**, particularly in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul), where there is a greater demand for court interpreters.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Typically earn **\$35 to \$50 per hour**.

Minnesota’s rates are higher than those in Cook County’s current pay scale but align well with the proposed rates of **\$65 per hour for certified interpreters**. Minnesota tends to offer competitive pay in high-demand areas.

11. Arizona

- **Certified interpreters:** Typically earn **\$50 to \$65 per hour**, with higher rates in cities like Phoenix and Tucson.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Pay ranges from **\$35 to \$50 per hour**.

Arizona’s pay rates are competitive with Cook County’s proposed rates. The state’s relatively high demand for court interpreters, particularly in urban centers, justifies pay levels similar to those proposed for Cook County.

12. North Carolina

- **Certified interpreters:** Typically earn **\$40 to \$50 per hour**, depending on the region and demand. Major cities like Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham may offer rates at the higher end of this scale.

- **Non-certified interpreters:** Generally, earn **\$25 to \$40 per hour**, depending on the specific county or region.

Comparison with Cook County’s Proposed Rates

- **Certified interpreters** in North Carolina earn **\$40 to \$50 per hour**, which is lower than the proposed **\$65 per hour** for certified interpreters in Cook County. The higher demand and cost of living in Cook County justify the proposed pay increase, making Cook County’s rate more competitive compared to North Carolina.
- **Non-certified interpreters** in North Carolina earn **\$25 to \$40 per hour**, which is also lower than Cook County’s proposed **\$55 per hour**. The proposed pay for non-certified interpreters in Cook County would be at the top end compared to North Carolina.

13. Illinois (Outside of Cook County)

- **Certified interpreters:** Pay varies across counties but typically ranges from **\$45 to \$55 per hour**.
- **Non-certified interpreters:** Earn **\$30 to \$45 per hour**.

In Illinois, Cook County has one of the highest needs for court interpreters due to its large and diverse population and the lowest pay rate for court interpreters.

Comparison Analysis

- **Federal courts** pay slightly more, with certified interpreters earning **\$59 per hour**, which is higher than Cook County’s current rates and in line with our proposed rate of **\$55 per hour**.
- **California and New York** offer the highest pay for court interpreters, often reaching **\$75 to \$85 per hour** for certified interpreters, particularly in urban areas. The proposed rate of **\$55 per hour for certified interpreters** in Cook County is competitive but still lower than the highest rates in these states.
- **Florida and Texas** have similar pay rates to what is proposed for Cook County, ranging from **\$50 to \$65 per hour** for certified interpreters. The proposed **\$65 per hour** in Cook County would align with these states and be competitive in comparison.
- In **Illinois**, pay rates outside of Cook County range from **\$45 to \$55 per hour** for certified interpreters, making the proposed rate of **\$65 per hour** consistent with the highest compensation within the state.

Conclusion

The proposed rates of **\$65 per hour for certified interpreters** and **\$55 per hour for non-certified interpreters** in Cook County are competitive when compared to other states and federal agencies. While not the highest in the nation, they reflect a fair adjustment in relation to the cost of living and the increased demand for interpreters in Cook County. This pay increase would ensure that the county remains competitive in recruiting and retaining skilled professionals.

The information on court interpreter pay rates comes from various sources, including:

1. **Official state and court websites:** Many state judicial systems publish interpreter pay scales or compensation guidelines. For example, federal court interpreter pay rates are publicly available from the U.S. Courts' official website.
2. **Interpreter associations:** Organizations like the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) and regional/state interpreter associations often provide data or reports on pay scales and working conditions for court interpreters.
3. **Public salary surveys:** Websites like Glassdoor, Indeed, and PayScale frequently compile salary data from court interpreters across different regions and job markets.
4. **State or county government salary schedules:** Many counties and states publish pay ranges for court interpreters in their judicial system compensation documents.

The data comes from those sources based on typical market conditions and publicly available salary surveys to provide a comparative look across states and federal levels.