

OPEN LETTER TO LYDIA PELEGRIN

January 27, 1997

Lydia Pelegrin
Chief, District Court Administration Division
Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts
Washington, D.C. 20544

Dear Ms. Pelegrin:

I would like to thank you for your presentation at the recent Workshop for Federal Court Interpreters that the Federal Judicial Center hosted in Albuquerque. You did an admirable job of facing an audience of angry and frustrated interpreters who feel that your office is not doing enough to remedy the serious problems that affect interpreting services in the federal courts. I believe it became evident to most of us that there is nothing to be gained by continuing to berate you, and that we must seek other avenues through which to address our problems while continuing to maintain communication with your office.

At the same time, I would like to reiterate NAJIT's position on compensation for contract interpreters. As you are aware, the Court Interpreters Advisory Subgroup has decided—according to the minutes of its December 13 teleconference—that there is “no need” for an increase in the per diem rate, which has remained at the same level since March 1991. (I serve on the Subgroup, but was unable to attend that meeting because I was in court.) The reason cited was that few courts report difficulty in finding contract interpreters willing to accept that rate of remuneration. The short-sighted, one-sided logic underlying the pronouncement that there is “no need” for an increase makes it painfully clear that the so-called Court Interpreters Advisory Subgroup does not represent the interests of interpreters. I assume that the moral argument that an increase is the right thing to do for a hard-working group of professionals carries no weight at all. I likewise assume that you would dismiss as irrelevant the point that if it were the Subgroup members' income that had been frozen for the past six years, they would surely disagree with the assertion that there was “no need” for a raise. I would therefore cite just one of the many compelling arguments in favor of recommending an increase: compensation is a vital component of working conditions, and if eroding wages make these conditions untenable, the overall pool of interpreting talent will be diminished as interpreters leave the field, to the detriment of the quantity and quality of the contract workforce, and the interests of justice served thereby.

NAJIT condemns the Subgroup's decision in the strongest possible terms.

Respectfully,



David Mintz
Chair, NAJIT Board of Directors