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IN-HOUSE INTERPRETERS vs. OUTSOURCING IN THE ELEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

This paper will examine the cost of operating the existing in-house court interpreters department in Miami-Dade County versus the cost for outsourcing this function while maintaining the existing organizational goal of the Administrative Office of the Courts, which is to provide qualified interpreters and excellent service to our customers. During the past ten years the office of interpreter services has received a steady increase in demand for services with no increase in staff. In order to cover all assignments the department has had to come up with innovative solutions to resolve this problem. For example, in the mornings, during regular court calendars, interpreters are assigned simultaneously to cover more than one assignment. Needs are met with the collaboration of the judiciary, with judges passing cases until an interpreter becomes available and with the assistance of freelance interpreters who are contracted out to handle the work overload. Decisions to expand the number of existing staff court interpreters, cut back on services provided, out source this service in its entirety, or develop a hybrid program (with a core of staff interpreters to cover emergencies and pre-selected work

assignments and the rest of the work contracted out to freelance interpreters) will be considered. The outcome of this research paper will aid the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida in determining which model will be more efficient and cost effective.

The Miami-Dade County Office of Interpreter Services has two main objectives: first, to assist the judiciary in providing equal access to justice for all non-English speaking defendants, witnesses and victims by providing qualified interpreters who can render a true and accurate translation of all proceedings. Second, to deliver these services promptly and with minimal disruption to the judicial process. The department consistently re-evaluates its day-to-day operations, provides regularly scheduled seminars dealing with specific terminology (i.e., legal, medical, weapons, etc.) and provides workshops to sharpen interpreter skills to meet these goals. Continuing education at local colleges and universities is strongly encouraged by the Administrative Office of the Courts in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit.

To analyze the cost of running the present in-house office of interpreter services, a random sample of raw data was collected from one of the nine courthouses within the Eleventh Judicial Circuit. Naturally, the location selected was the one with the highest concentration of interpreters -- the Richard E. Gerstein Justice Building. Twenty-eight interpreters and two translators are assigned on a permanent basis to provide assistance to forty-six

judges, twenty-five hearing officers and four general masters in this location. A database was designed in Microsoft Excel to track the number of assignments, the length of each assignment and the specific location where that assignment took place. The data was collected from each interpreter's daily log, which describes in detail that interpreter's activities (the individual interpreter providing the service fills out a daily log of services performed).

A comparative analysis of the data collected reveals that the rate of cost per appearance for in-house interpreters is \$2.04 less and more cost effective than outsourcing this service in Miami Dade County: even when compared to the unrealistic current rate of twenty-five dollars per hour paid by the courts to freelance interpreters. The rate of twenty-five dollars per hour was agreed upon in the late seventies and early eighties when the office of court interpreter services was created. This negotiation was consummated between the providing agencies and the court. The rate in the private sector has increased through the years to a current rate of ninety to one hundred and thirty-five dollars per hour. Although, the circuit has experienced increases in every other area, it has neglected to revise the outdated twenty-five dollar freelance interpreters' rate. As a result, the pool of qualified freelance interpreters willing to work at this rate has fallen to a dangerously low number.

This [research paper](#) is available in its entirety in portable document format. To access, you must first obtain and install the Adobe Acrobat Reader



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