



Judicial Council of California

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Item No.: 24-096

For business meeting on May 17, 2024

Title

Trial Court Budget: California Court
Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program

Agenda Item Type

Action Required

Effective Date

May 17, 2024

Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes Affected

N/A

Date of Report

May 6, 2024

Recommended by

Hon. Jonathan B. Conklin, Chair
Ms. Rebecca Fleming, Vice-Chair
Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee

Contact

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Executive Summary

The Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommends an allocation methodology for the \$6.8 million appropriated in the Budget Act of 2023 for the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program. The pilot program is intended to increase the number of court interpreter employees in the courts by reimbursing potential interpreters for costs associated with their training, coursework, and up to three examination fees to become a court interpreter.

Recommendation

The Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommends that the Judicial Council, effective May 17, 2024:

1. Approve the allocation methodology for the \$6.8 million appropriation for implementation of the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program; and
2. Direct Language Access Services staff of the Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts to manage the pilot program and begin the pilot no later than July 1, 2024.

Relevant Previous Council Action

As the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program is a new program described and funded in the Budget Act of 2023, there is no previous council action.

This recommendation was presented to the Judicial Branch Budget Committee on March 13, 2024, and approved for consideration by the Judicial Council.

Analysis/Rationale

Budget bill language in the Budget Act of 2023 (Attachment A) authorizes the pilot program to begin by July 1, 2024, and end by June 30, 2029. The pilot program must include the participation of a minimum of four superior courts, one of which must be Los Angeles. Up to 10 applicants who wish to be court interpreters will be selected by the Judicial Council per superior court per year.

The one-time funding for the pilot was reappropriated from unspent funding in the Budget Act of 2021¹ that was previously allocated for the Court Interpreter Employee Incentive Grant program.

Under the pilot, participants will be reimbursed for their training costs and for up to three interpreter examination fees. Participants must pass a background check prior to acceptance and then again after successfully passing all required exams and prior to any offer of employment. Pilot participants must also agree, assuming they pass all required examinations while in the pilot, to enroll with the Judicial Council as a court interpreter and be employed by a court as a court interpreter for at least three years.

Allocation methodology

Funding for this program (\$6.8 million) is primarily for the purpose of reimbursement of pilot participants' training and examination costs. The Budget Act also states that, "Of the amount reappropriated, the Judicial Council shall be allocated \$150,000 each fiscal year for administrative support of the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program." Language Access Services recently hired a Senior Analyst to manage the pilot program. Courts may also be reimbursed for the cost of initial background checks as part of the pilot program's administration budget.

The pilot program will commence by July 1, 2024, and the first cohort of participants will be chosen by December 2024. Beginning in January 2025, the first of four cohorts will begin in the program. Three cohorts will have two years each to pass the required examinations, and the final cohort will have 18 months. Approximately \$393,000 will be dedicated to each cohort every six months for reimbursement of training and examination costs.

¹ Sen. Bill 170 (Stats. 2021, ch. 240),
https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB170.

Funding will be allocated as follows:

Fiscal Year	Administrative Costs	Reimbursement Maximum	Reimbursement Covers
2023–24	\$150,000	NA	NA
2024–25 Cohort 1 starts January 2025	\$150,000	\$393,334	Cohort 1 (6 months)
2025–26 Cohort 2 starts January 2026	\$150,000	\$1,180,000	Cohort 1 (12 months) Cohort 2 (6 months)
2026–27 Cohort 3 starts January 2027	\$150,000	\$1,573,333	Cohort 1 (6 months) Cohort 2 (12 months) Cohort 3 (6 months)
2027–28 Cohort 4 starts January 2028	\$150,000	\$1,573,333	Cohort 2 (6 months) Cohort 3 (12 months) Cohort 4 (6 months)
2028–29	\$150,000	\$1,180,000	Cohort 3 (6 months) Cohort 4 (12 months)
Total	\$900,000	\$5,900,000	

All superior courts will be invited to participate in the optional pilot program. The reimbursement maximum will allow an average of 100 pilot participants to be reimbursed an average of \$7,866 per year in training and examination costs (actual amounts will depend on the number of pilot participants chosen each year). Judicial Council staff will directly reimburse allowable costs to pilot participants. Excess funding will carry over each year of the pilot until the final cohort year in 2028–29, and any unused funding at the end of the pilot will be returned to the Trial Court Trust Fund.

Program management

The pilot will be managed by Language Access Services in the Judicial Council’s Center for Families, Children & the Courts. The initial participating courts will be identified by spring 2024, and courts will be extensively involved with the selection and monitoring of participants throughout the pilot. The application process for Cohort 1 pilot participants will begin by July 2024, and participants will be selected by December 2024.

Expectations for pilot participants are as follows:

- Pilot participants are expected to demonstrate consistent, measurable progress toward the goal of obtaining certification, and are expected to complete the pilot program in two years or less;

- Participants will be required to submit a progress report to the Judicial Council every six months detailing courses taken, self-directed activities outside of formal coursework, exams taken, exam scores, and a self-evaluation of their progress;
- Progress reports will be shared with the participating court. Participants who do not demonstrate consistent progress toward becoming certified (or registered) will be removed from the program;
- Participants who do not complete the program and obtain an interpreting credential in two years may reapply to be able to continue, except for the final cohort;
- Participants are expected to work in the courts for at least three years after completing the pilot program, passing all required exams, and enrolling with the Judicial Council; and
- Participants who leave court employment before the end of three years, depending on the circumstances, may be required to pay back the cost of their training and exam fees.

Benefits

The pilot's goal to increase the number of court interpreter employees in the courts aligns with *The Strategic Plan for California's Judicial Branch*, including recommended best practices to support Goal I, Access, Fairness, Diversity, and Inclusion: "Implement, enhance, and expand multilingual and culturally and socially responsive programs, including educational programming, self-help centers, and interpreter services."²

The pilot program also supports current efforts by Language Access Services to increase the number of qualified court interpreters by assisting near-passers of the Bilingual Interpreting Examination for certified languages through focused training efforts.

Policy implications

None.

Comments

Public comments were not solicited for this proposal because the recommendations are within the Judicial Council's purview to approve without circulation.

Alternatives considered

No alternatives were considered. The pilot application and reimbursement process will be developed consistent with the language in the Budget Act of 2023.

² California Courts, *The Strategic Plan for California's Judicial Branch* (July 19, 2019), p. 6, www.courts.ca.gov/3045.htm.

Fiscal and Operational Impacts

Courts that elect to participate in the pilot will be responsible for providing successful candidates with employment, subject to available positions and funding. An increase in court interpreter employees across the state will help courts to address the language access needs of court users with limited English proficiency.

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: 2023 Budget Act Language on Pilot Program

0250-494—Reappropriation, Judicial Branch. The balance of the appropriation provided in the following citation is reappropriated for the purposes provided for below, and shall be available for encumbrance or expenditure until June 30, 2029.

0932—Trial Court Trust Fund

- (1) Up to \$6,800,000 of the amount appropriated in Schedule (4), Item 0250-101-0932, Budget Act of 2021 (Chs. 21, 69, and 240, Statutes of 2021), for implementation of the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program.
 - (a) The California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program is hereby created. The amount reappropriated in this item, \$6,800,000 shall be allocated to the Judicial Council to administer the pilot program. The pilot program shall commence by July 1, 2024, and end June 30, 2029.
 - (b) The pilot program shall include the participation of a minimum of four superior courts, one of which must be Los Angeles. Up to 10 applicants wanting to be a certified court interpreter will be selected by the Judicial Council per superior court, per year. Depending on local court needs, training participants for the pilot program may be selected for registered languages. The pilot program will cover the costs of training, coursework and up to three interpreter exam fees for applicants.
 - (c) Training participants must pass a background check prior to participating in the pilot program and must also pass a background check a second time prior to any offer of employment by the participating courts.
 - (d) Upon successful completion of the coursework, passage of the required examinations, and enrollment with the Judicial Council, the participating local court shall offer employment as a court interpreter employee to successful training participants, subject to available funding and open positions.
 - (e) Training participants must agree to work in the courts for at least three years after they successfully pass all the required examinations and enroll with the Judicial Council as a court interpreter. Participants who are hired and remain employed with the court for a minimum of three years are not required to pay back any costs. Participants who leave court employment prior to the end of three years may be required to pay back the costs of training, coursework, and exam fees on a prorated basis based on length of employment. Participants who are hired by the court for any length of time but are subsequently laid off, terminated, or otherwise released from employment

not of their own volition or due to any fault of their own are not required to pay back any costs for training, coursework, and exam fees. The court may waive, at its discretion, the repayment of costs of training, coursework, and interpreter exam fees if a participant leaves court employment prior to the end of three years due to a significant personal hardship.

- (f) Of the amount reappropriated, the Judicial Council shall be allocated \$150,000 each fiscal year for administrative support of the California Court Interpreter Workforce Pilot Program.