



Personal Testimony

H417/S347– An Act Relative to the Certification of Interpreters in Educational Settings Orally Submitted on Wednesday, September 4th, 2019

Bernardo Llorente

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Dear Representatives and Senators,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. My name is Bernardo Llorente and I am the Manager of Translation and Interpreting Services for Framingham Public Schools. In addition to this role, I have over 15 years of experience in the field of translation and interpreting in Europe and the US. First, I would like to thank you for highlighting the importance of language access through the Act Relative to the Certification of Interpreters in Educational Settings (Bill S. 347). I truly believe that competent and qualified interpreters are necessary in schools to ensure equitable access and opportunities for families to communicate with their child/ren's teachers and administrators.. This is an important part of the mission of Framingham Public Schools, as mandated by Civil Rights requirements of the TITLE VI federal law. In my own district and when consulting with others, I advocate to ensure that their interpreters receive training around the professional role of a school interpreter, the ethics of interpreting, and key background and terminology related to the educational setting.

I firmly believe the question of language access is a complicated one. As Manager of Translation and Interpreting Services for a linguistically diverse school district, I am acutely aware of factors such as school budgets, volume of interpreting needs, and the nature of interpreting work (hourly and as needed) that make it difficult for districts to develop a large enough pool of qualified interpreters to fill their needs. As such, I would also like to take this opportunity to provide insight into what school interpreting looks like on the ground. My hope is that this information will help those who are drafting the certification process develop requirements that are realistic, feasible, and sustainable; requirements that keep in mind the needs of interpreters, are sensitive to the complexities of school districts, and, most importantly, truly support our families.

As previously stated, I run the Translation Office for Framingham Public Schools (FPS). FPS has a diverse student population and currently instructs students from over 70 countries who speak approximately 72 languages. Our school district's 3 "official" languages are English, Spanish and Portuguese. Through our Translation Office, Framingham Public Schools provides timely, quality translations and interpreting services to families whose first language is not English. We do this

internally with a limited budget, and without relying on third parties (e.g. translation companies), and it works. As proof, we have been providing consultancy and support to several other districts in New England that would like to replicate our system.

The FPS Translation Office consists of me and my pool of interpreters and translators. I recruit, train, and evaluate this team of professionals, who provide thousands of translations and interpreting sessions per year. New candidates must pass an assessment that our office adapted from resources published by the American Translators Association. Additionally, our interpreters are evaluated and given feedback throughout the year. Our interpreters, like most interpreting models in the educational setting, work on an hourly and as needed basis (freelance). As a result, most of our interpreters live locally and interpret part-time. Additionally, most of my interpreters are native speakers of the target language (e.g. Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Haitian Creole) and hold high school and university degrees from other countries. These interpreters help our families feel welcome in our school communities and accurately relay the families' voices.

One of my biggest challenges currently is recruitment. Not only do I look for skilled interpreters, but they have to be willing to work for the district's contractual hourly rate and have a flexible schedule given that schools' interpreting needs change week to week. While a certification process (e.g. thoughtful assessment and evaluation tools) will help promote best practices in school-based interpreting, excessive requirements (e.g. higher education and training programs, tuition fees and exam fees) could also create barriers for otherwise skilled individuals to become interpreters. This could have unintended consequences for school districts (e.g. smaller interpreter pool, more expensive interpreting fees) and, most importantly, our families (e.g. less effective language access services). This being said, I am advocating for a bill that gives districts the flexibility and autonomy to design an effective interpretation and translation management system that meets the needs of the community and school district.

Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,

Bernardo Llorente
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