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REGION 2 TRIAL COURTS AND COURT INTERPRETER UNION TO MEDIATE DISPUTES

BACKGROUND:
The 15 Trial Courts in the Bay Area/Northern Coastal Region (Region 2) continue to bargain in good faith with the Court Interpreter Employee Union to develop our first Memorandum of Understanding. Bargaining began in October of 2004 and has continued at a steady pace with tentative agreements being reached on a great majority of the issues at hand.

Court Interpreters have typically worked for the Courts as independent contractors, receiving a daily pay rate and providing for their own medical and retirement benefits.

Former Governor Gray Davis signed the legislation with the following side letter: "In recognition of the State's current financial pressures, I am signing this bill with the understanding that the proponents have agreed not to commence collective bargaining until 2005."

In anticipation of bargaining, the Judicial Council and State Trial Court Executives worked diligently to secure $15 million dollars to fully fund benefit costs for Court Interpreters. This represents an increase of over 22% to the Interpreter Budget, bringing the total annual budget to $87 million dollars. Other State Trial Court programs will receive far less in new funding.

CURRENT STATUS:
The remaining key issues needing resolution are:

Wages:
The Court Bargaining Team has offered to maintain the current daily rate of $265, which amounts to an annual salary of $68,900.

The Union has countered with a proposal that would allow some part-time Interpreters to receive a salary increase ranging from 30% - 44%.

Benefits:
The Court Bargaining Team has offered precisely the same benefit plan that is offered to the employees of the largest bargaining unit at each of the Region's 15 Trial Courts. This benefit plan includes sick leave, vacation leave, medical, dental and retirement benefits.

The Union countered with a proposal seeking a customized benefit plan that would provide Interpreters with a greater benefit package than employees in any of the Region's 15 Trial Courts.

SUMMARY:
Court and Union representatives have agreed to submit the remaining few issues to mediation under the direction of a State Mediator. Sessions have been scheduled for August 3rd and August 17th. The Court Bargaining Team is confident that an agreement can be reached as a result of these mediation sessions.