

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1916 (Lee) – As Introduced February 12, 2026

Policy Committee: Judiciary

Vote: 11 - 1

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill expands the Trial Court Interpreter Employment and Labor Relations Act to include sign language interpreters.

FISCAL EFFECT:

Unknown, but likely minor, fiscal impact on the courts (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund). There are currently nine ASL-certified employee interpreters throughout the state and about 40 certified, contract ASL interpreters. Judicial Council reports that ASL interpreters have different working conditions than do other court interpreters. For example, ASL interpreters often use team interpreting to allow for breaks given the physical nature of the interpreting and the pay rates tend to differ. Overall, Judicial Council does not anticipate a noticeable fiscal impact, but notes that the bill will impact bargaining across Judicial Council's four interpreter regions; Los Angeles currently has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place for its employed ASL interpreters, so there may be implications for that existing MOU.

COMMENTS:

Court interpreters provide constitutionally mandated sign and spoken language services to the court, attorneys, defendants, victims, and witnesses in trial court proceedings. These services are vital to ensuring access and fairness in the trial courts. SB 371 (Escutia) Chapter 1047, Statutes of 2002 established the Trial Court Interpreter Employment and Labor Relations Act, which among things, established workplace protections for court interpreters including statutory authorization to form, join, and participate in a union. ASL interpreters were not included in the Act. This bill would remove that exemption.

As of March 2025, the Judicial Council reported nearly 1,856 certified registered court interpreters representing 114 spoken languages and ASL on their Master List of certified and registered court interpreters. The same report reflected that from 2020 – 2024, the superior courts reported over 2.5 million interpretations, 20,000 of which were ASL. According to the report, there are 44 certified ASL court interpreters in California's superior courts.

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