



March 21, 2019

To: Assembly Member Evan Low
Chair, Assembly Business and Professions Committee
1020 N Street, Room 383
Sacramento, CA 95814

Senator Steven Glazer
Chair, Senate Business, Professions, and Economic Development Committee
State Capitol, Room 2053
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: California Court Reporters Board, Support with Recommendations, Sunset Review

The California Court Reporters Association (CCRA) is a statewide organization whose membership includes court reporters that are in the freelance, CART/captioning, official, and student communities. CCRA supports the extension of the California Court Reporters Board (CRB) with multiple recommendations. While we endorse the ongoing work of the Board, there are a number of items that should be addressed expeditiously.

1) Increased budget and Transcript Reimbursement Fund

In recent years the CRB has raised concerns about its operating budget. To that end, CCRA agreed to support legislation to allow the CRB to increase the licensing fee for every court reporter in California. Just recently, the licensing fee was doubled. Every penny of the fee is devoted to the CRB, which relies exclusively on these fees for operations and its other obligations.

While this increase in funding stream is welcomed, CCRA recommends that the first item to be funded out of the new revenue should be the Transcript Reimbursement Fund (TRF). Before any other operational items, including new hires, are paid for out of these new revenues, CCRA believes that the TRF must first be fully funded. As you know, current statute requires the CRB to annually transfer \$300,000 to the TRF. Unfortunately, due to apparent budgeting concerns, the TRF has been inoperable and the required funds were not deposited in 2018. As a result, many low-income litigants were denied their request for reimbursement. CCRA recommends a hard commitment that the TRF be fully funded.

Additionally, CCRA requests the Board to support and promote an expansion of its mandatory annual contribution to \$400,000.



2) Licensing of CART providers

Many in California's deaf and hard-of-hearing community rely on CART captioners for services in a broad spectrum of forums including courts, schools, and other governmental settings. Despite this need, California lacks a specific licensing protocol for these CART captioners. As a result, unlicensed court reporters are often utilized for these services without undergoing specific testing for CART skills. For the past few years, CCRA has advocated for the CRB to license these CART captioners. We recognize that such licensing has been included in the CRB's 5-year plan, but to our knowledge, no affirmative steps have been taken by the CRB. CCRA recommends the CRB immediately initiate licensing protocols for CART captioners. It is important to note that the CRB recently approved "voice writers" to operate in California. This approval moved very quickly. CCRA wants confirmation that the same urgency be shown in approving CART captioners.

3) CRB should clarify its recent action re: "Voice Writing"

At its most recent meeting, the CRB approved "voice writing" in California. Throughout the pre-vote debate concerns were raised that this approval should not occur without a requirement to test individual voice writers in this technology before they are approved to be licensed in California. There was even mention that the license issued by the CRB should have a unique identifier reflecting a "voice" authority versus traditional shorthand reporting. However, after the CRB approved voice writing, members of the Board and its legal counsel stated that the current licensing exam is all that is needed to be approved for voice writing in California. Essentially, it did not require a separate test specific to voice writing technology. The CRB went so far as to announce that current licensees could immediately begin voice writing, despite never having been tested in the discipline. This is not only contrary to what was raised during the CRB discussion, but also contrary to what is best for consumers. Every licensee should be tested in his/her specific technology. It's also concerning that the CRB conceded that many statutes would need to be changed to incorporate voice writers, but indicated that legislation could be pursued AFTER the Board's action. This is contrary to standard protocol and could be problematic for oversight of licensees. CCRA asks that the CRB officially announce that no one may "voice write" unless and until the CRB provides technology specific tests and the voice writer has successfully passed such test.

4) CRB allow for online license renewals.

Thousands of court reporters are required to renew their licenses annually. However, the CRB does not offer an on-line option for this renewal. CCRA asks that the CRB takes steps to initiate an online renewal protocol.

5) CRB require licensees to be mandated to maintain continuing education credits (CEUs).

For many years, CCRA has advocated a mandatory continuing education requirement for licensees. Unfortunately, CCRA's sponsored legislation to establish this mandate was vetoed.



However, the CRB could also take action to mandate continuing education requirements. CCRA urges the CRB to formalize a CEU requirement.

Sincerely,

Rachel N. Barkume

President Rachel N. Barkume, CCRA