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Letter: Until pay is adjusted, interpreters will continue to be scarce

By: Mass. Lawyers Weekly Staff July 22, 2022

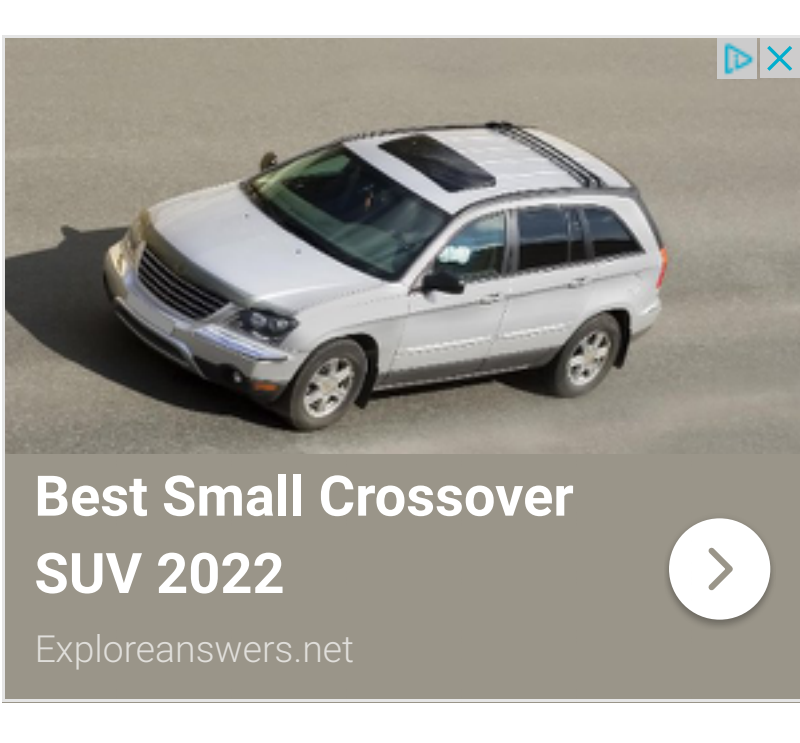
To the editor:

If you have been to court recently, you have probably noticed that cases are regularly postponed because there was no interpreter in court and no interpreter available, even for Spanish. As one judge said last week as a motion was being continued, "They are in short supply these days."

In fact, it has been quite some time since there were enough interpreters to cover all the courts where they are needed. The fact that a man went to jail for lack of an interpreter was mentioned on the editorial page of The Boston Globe on July 12.

The size of the population that needs interpreter help is over 8 percent, but that number has been steady for many years. One of the several reasons there are few interpreters now is because per diem interpreters have been begging for a cost of living adjustment and have received nothing. Some interpreters can't afford to go to court any more. Their last increase was in 2006. That's 16 years ago! According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the dollar in 2006 is worth only 59 cents today. Travel compensation for interpreters was also cut by 75 percent in 2008.

Inflation continues to increase, and interpreters will continue to be scarce until this and other problems are solved. The name of the Interpreter Office was recently changed to the "Office of Language Access." That sounds nice and up to date. However, if there is to be any "Language Access" worthy of the name, the interpreters need to be able to make a living. We need an adjustment after 16 years of waiting.



Dr. Michael O'Laughlin

Carlisle

The writer is a board member of the Massachusetts Association of Court Interpreters.

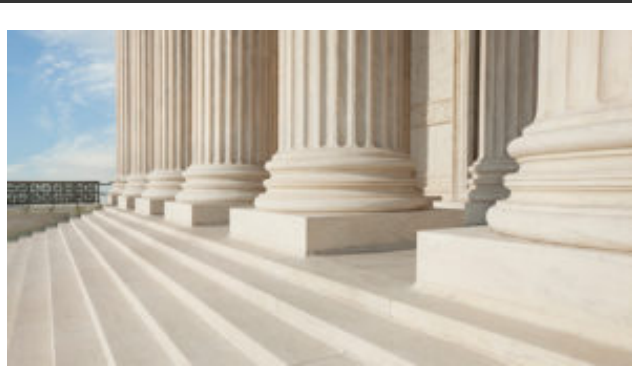
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Should the Governor's Council be allowed to start hearings on judicial nominations before their scheduled times?

- Yes, because witness testimony is rare and predictable, and changing the time has little impact.
- No, the council should follow its established protocol, in case members of the public are planning to arrive at the appointed hour.

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