**Colorado’s courtroom interpreters — among lowest-paid in nation — eye walkout as pay raise effort stalls**

State Judicial Department acknowledges work stoppage could have “vast and significant impact” on court proceedings

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A contingent of Colorado’s courtroom interpreters is considering walking off the job next week in protest of what they say is low pay from the Colorado Judicial Department.

The threat of a work stoppage Monday follows unsuccessful attempts this spring by the interpreters, who are independent contractors, to negotiate higher pay from the Judicial Department, according to records obtained by The Denver Post and interviews with five Colorado interpreters who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of professional retaliation.

Court interpreters are hired at an hourly rate to translate everything said during court proceedings so that participants who don’t speak English understand what’s going on. Criminal defendants have a constitutional right to an interpreter in court, and cases that need an interpreter can’t go forward without one.

The Judicial Department acknowledged in a statement Tuesday that a “grassroots” work stoppage would impact “the administration of justice in Colorado’s courtrooms.”

“Nothing can proceed without an interpreter,” one interpreter said. “Nothing.”

Certified Spanish interpreters in Colorado are paid $45 an hour to work in court, while interpreters of other languages earn $55 per hour, according to state records.

Those rates haven’t changed in several years and are on the low end of what other states pay freelance interpreters in the courts, according to data kept by the National Center for State Courts, a Virginia-based nonprofit. Interpreters in Florida and Arizona courts earn some of the highest rates, and can make up to $100 an hour.

In March, 83 Colorado interpreters signed a petition seeking a $10 increase in hourly rates that was sent to the Judicial Department’s Office of Language Access, which certifies interpreters for work in the courts. An identical request was sent to Denver County Court, which operates separately from state courts.

The interpreters cited a pandemic-induced shortage of interpreters, increasing demand for language services in the courts and increased opportunities for interpreters to work remotely for higher pay in other states as justification for a Colorado rate increase, among other reasons, according to the letter.

The six-page letter and additional three pages of research received a four-sentence response from Jenny Moore, the office’s program administrator, in which she said she’d keep interpreters “in the loop as we start planning for FY24,” according to an email obtained by The Post.

“Waiting two years, that’s crazy,” one interpreter said Monday.

In a statement Tuesday, a spokesman for the Judicial Department said the interpreters’ request for a pay increase came too late this year to be considered in the upcoming fiscal year’s budget, which starts in July.

“Unfortunately, outreach from the independent contract interpreters came as the state budget was being finalized — too late to have a substantive impact,” the statement reads. “Planning for the FY24 budget cycle will begin this fall, at which time a possible rate increase for interpreters will be considered.”

On April 1, some interpreters followed up with a second letter in which they reiterated a request for higher pay, sought other concessions and threatened work stoppages if they didn’t hear back on the issue by the end of April.

With that deadline drawing near, the interpreters are now preparing to walk out but hoping to avoid it, they told The Post.

“We don’t want to gum things up and have people not get their bond advisements, and not have their constitutional rights,” one interpreter said. “Our goal is to provide language access to non-English speakers… there’s no malice in the interpreter group. We hope OLA and Denver respond to us so that doesn’t have to happen.”

The Judicial Department’s statement noted that while the Judicial Department sets the pay rate policy, the funding comes from the General Assembly, and that “difficult budget decisions must be made on an annual basis.” The statement said those most impacted by a work stoppage would be people who rely on interpreters.

“It will… have vast and significant impact on Coloradans appearing in court; those who rely on the valuable service provided by the language access interpreters,” the statement said.

The Judicial Department has contracts with 583 interpreters to work in the courts, the statement said; about half of those live in Colorado. There are currently 68 certified Spanish interpreters based in Colorado and 269 interpreters of other languages in the state, according to the Judicial Department.

As freelancers, they are not unionized and are loosely organized. About 60 responded to a recent survey about a potential work stoppage, and more than 80% of respondents favored a walk-out, several interpreters said.

In addition to grievances over pay, interpreters who spoke with The Post also pointed to concerns with how travel time is compensated and a lack of support from the Judicial Department during the height of the pandemic, when courts shut down and work dried up.

Of the 33 states where pay rates are tracked by the National Center for State Courts, only three states — Alabama, Massachusetts and Montana — pay a fixed hourly rate that is less than Colorado’s. Another 14 states pay hourly rates that range from below Colorado’s hourly rate to above it, depending on the interpreter’s experience and language. Thirteen states pay higher hourly rates than Colorado, and three states pay the same hourly rate, according to the Center.

“A lot of interpreters are on the edge to quit,” an interpreter said this week. “They say, ‘I can go drive for Uber and make more money.'”

The Colorado Association of Professional Interpreters, a group that exists to support local interpreters, said in a statement that the organization “strongly believes that interpreters deserve compensation that aligns with the rising cost of living in our state, commensurate with the highly-specialized services they provide.”

A Denver County Court administrator did not return a request for comment.

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Police: Buffalo gunman aimed to keep killing if he got away

**Leaf**

We could blame the parents for not knowing what their son was up to and then going out and buying him a gun. We could blame the authorities who knew he was a troubled young man and tried to intervene but didn't follow through. We could blame the radicalization of hate sites online which encourage this kind of behavior. We could blame the mental health officials who didn't take his threats of murder serious which allowed him to continue his sinister behavior. We could blame pro-gun groups who seem to look at these shootings as just collateral damages to their right to own their own weapons. We could blame the laws in place which weren't enforced and which allowed the shooter to purchase another weapon. We could collectively blame society for letting these incidences to continue for decades without any real plan to correct these mass shootings.

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Union Station was called a “lawless hellhole.” Have 1,200 arrests and citations changed anything?

**IntegrityFirst**

With regard to redirecting the homeless and those arrested for drug related charges to social/addiction/mental health services, you can’t fault DPD or RTD for their refusal to accept the help. Reasonable people who have ever tackled addiction or participated in therapy know that if someone isn’t willing to engage in getting better the therapy is doomed to fail.

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4 Air Force cadets may not graduate due to vaccine refusal

**Trumpet**

Having served on active duty for over 20 years and having graduated from an Academy I can say unequivocally that these Cadets, as well as the other military officers, that refuse to get the vaccine are not suited for military service and need to be prosecuted under the UCMJ and discharged. Not only is it about military units being combat effective, but if they think they can refuse an order for this, and the service lets them do it, then what other orders do they think they are 'entitled' to refuse. Quite frankly, I blame the kinder, gentler Air Force Academy, as they should have charged the Cadets with disobeying a direct order and then separated them within weeks of their refusal as well as require the Juniors and Seniors to pay the taxpayers back. Why is USAFA even giving them more time after they've proved they aren't officer material? I guarantee that every one of these Cadets that have refused to get the vaccine on so called religious grounds (even the Pope called getting the vaccine a "moral obligation") got other vaccines from the first day they got there, and didn't have any religious problems then.

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Colorado tops in bank robberies in 2021; some blame fentanyl

**T**

All banks need a "pen" at the front entrance, like a cage made of rebar and bulletproof glass. Once the perp exits the bank, a bank employee remotely triggers the cage. The perp is left like rat in a trap until law enforcement arrives with all the evidence needed for 100% conviction, punishable by execution.

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Buffalo shooter targeted Black neighborhood, officials say

**4wheelin**

The FBI knew about this kid and did nothing. They even let him legally buy guns. How is that even possible? Why would the FBI let him buy those gun? What a joke our system is From the DailyMail: Buffalo white supremacist, 18, threatened a school graduation shooting last year and was given psychiatric treatment - but still legally bought three guns: Classmates reveal he acted strangely, wore hazmat suit to school for a week and scared them  Payton Gendron, 18, was investigated by the New York State Police for threating to shoot his classmates during graduation in June 2021. Police suggested mental health evaluation and counseling

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