

February 23, 2021

To: Members of the Assembly and Senate Committees on Judiciary

The tragic death of Spanish interpreter Sergio Cafaro, my dear friend and colleague, could have been avoided if the Los Angeles Superior Court (LASC) took our safety seriously and enforced its own safety measures. As legal interpreters, we proudly provide an essential service that's critical to access in the criminal justice system. But we need to feel and be safe as we perform our duties.

In theory LASC COVID protocols are excellent, in practice there are extreme variations in enforcement. In some courtrooms guidelines are strictly followed, in others they are ignored. There is NO enforcement in the hallways and elevators. Courthouses are crowded, with too many cases scheduled. Screening upon entry is limited to verifying that persons entering have a case on calendar.

Our cognitively demanding work is made even more challenging in the pandemic due to the necessary use of masks, social distancing and attorneys appearing by phone or video (the difficulties we confront to hear and interpreter accurately cannot be overstated). On top of that we are under constant stress as we interpret, having to also monitor safe distance, correct mask usage and overcrowding.

Interpreters should not be put in the position of having to enforce court safety protocols and they should not have to risk their lives due to lack of enforcement mechanisms. Add to all of the above a pattern of court administration blaming us for exposures and denying requests for time off to quarantine, and you have a situation rife for outbreaks and unnecessary spread of this deadly virus.

Karen Stevens
Certified Spanish Interpreter
Clara Shortridge Folz Courthouse
Los Angeles