

Translators and interpreters unite to demand AB5 exemption

Language professionals across California are reeling as a new law has companies leaving the state and giving work to their out-of-state competitors

LOS ANGELES, CALIF., USA, April 22, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Freelance translators and interpreters, a usually non-political and diverse group, are used to giving a voice to California's minorities. Now, because of Assembly Bill 5 (AB5) they are raising their voice in unison to demand an exemption from this anti-freelance law.

"Translators and interpreters are independent contractors by design and by choice since we work on different projects, for many clients," said Gloria Rivera, a certified court and medical translator and interpreter. "This law is forcing us to become something we are not. Companies are not hiring us. They are leaving the state and contracting our non-Californian colleagues".

"AB5 is shackling our professional response and collaboration at a time when interpreters and translators are in high demand to help communicate vital information with non-English speaking residents of California," said David Higbee, a certified court interpreter and one of the group's co-founders. "As many workers demand coronavirus bailouts, we just want an exemption from this law that is hurting way more people than it helps. We could be working safely from home, but this law is not letting us."

[Language Pros Hurt By AB5](#) seeks an exemption to the law that covers these professionals, who contribute an estimated \$2 billion annually to the state economy. There are more than 5,000 language professionals in California, including about 1,200 independent certified interpreters in all languages.

Independent interpreters and translators are in demand daily - providing services in healthcare, law, human services, business, entertainment and more. COVID-19 press briefings are conducted every day with the help of interpreters for the deaf and languages other than English.

"One of the many ironies here is that language professionals make a living by giving a voice to others when they need it most — we're generally not the type to use our own voices on issues like this," Higbee said. "But this struggle affects our very livelihoods."

State legislators created AB5 to help "misclassified" workers, such as rideshare drivers, by requiring companies to hire them as employees and provide benefits. In doing so, the state outlawed most independent contractors, forcing them to become employees of any company that uses them unless specific criteria are met. With the sweep of a pen, Gov. Gavin Newsom



made it illegal as of Jan. 1 for Californians to work for themselves in hundreds of different careers and professions. A few professions were declared exempt from the law like doctors and attorneys, but not interpreters and translators.

AB5 presumes “that language service companies will comply with the law and offer jobs, even if it means being a W-2 employee for merely a three-hour ‘gig,’” said group co-founder Esther M. Hermida, who has 26 years of experience in the legal field. “We are currently seeing the opposite. We are being cut-off from the rest of the country. We are radioactive when it comes to agencies hiring us.”

The result is that people who most need professional language services are not getting them in a timely manner, or with the necessary precision. “AB5 is causing a major disruption to the legal system that relies on the availability of interpreters to communicate with clients or witnesses,” Hermida said.

Language Pros Hurt By AB5 supports a broad amendment and exemption for translators and interpreters. A bill, SB900, by State Sen. Jerry Hill (D-San Mateo) was recently amended to include exemptions to translators and interpreters from AB5. It expands the definition of “referral agency” to include a business that connects clients with service providers who offer certified interpretation or translation services. The bill also expands the definition of “tutor.”

“Our legislators must take a closer look at how much we contribute to the well-being of all Californians by providing language access in and out of the courtroom, even at a moment’s notice,” Hermida said.

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