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SEMINAR DESCRIPTION:
COURT INTERPRETATION SEMINAR
FOUNDATIONS OF COURT INTERPRETING

Introduction

This memorandum is designed to provide you with information regarding the Foundations of Court Interpretation Seminar. The seminar presented by Carla M. Mathers, Esquire, CSC, SC:L (2000) will assist participants in understanding the procedural aspects of the legal system, the protocol, roles and ethics for court interpreters, the substantive areas that interpreters in a legal setting face, the qualifications required to interpret in court and on proper preparation for an interpreted assignment. Specialty areas, such as the law of privileged communications, interpretation as hearsay, responding to subpoenas and working with Deaf interpreters will also be explored. Interpreters will gain a clear understanding of what constitutes a legal assignment and what limitations interpreters must impose on themselves in the face of often-demanding reality of high demand and low supply. Participants will be afforded hands-on practice in interpreting legal texts and in vocabulary development.

This memorandum will describe the Seminar's content areas, goals, objectives, and instructional level. This memorandum will conclude with a description of

the target audience for the seminar

A. **Content Area**

The Seminar will focus on four broad content or knowledge areas described in the explanation of content areas examined on the RID Specialist Certificate: Legal -- Written Test. In addition, the Seminar will address those areas in which are listed in the RID promotional materials for the performance evaluation. The seminar is not a preparatory seminar to take the RID Legal evaluation and should not be advertised in that manner. The seminar will, however, provide participants with state of the art information regarding the areas the RID has deemed substantive and pertinent in preparing to pass the RID Legal evaluation. This memorandum will discuss each of the areas it will address.

1. **Language**

Throughout the Seminar, issues related to legal vocabulary, definitions of terms, and use of legal English are constantly examined through hands-on practice and discussion both in spoken English and in American Sign Language. Participants have the opportunity to immediately use that information through intensive text analysis and practice interpreting.

Interpreters are introduced to research in the areas of powerless and powerful language by contemporary linguists and socio-cultural linguists. An extensive bibliography is available to participants who seek more in-depth knowledge in this related arena.

Cultural and linguistic challenges unique to the legal interpreting realm and unique to working with linguistic minorities are explored and participants are able to practice newly acquired knowledge in a safe and supportive environment.

Strategies for determining the need for Deaf interpreters are discussed and analyzed. The ability to realistically assess the interpreter's own skills in working with Deaf or hard of hearing persons who are monolingual or who have limited language skills are discussed, including practice in explaining to the Court why and when a Deaf interpreter may be indicated. Intensive practice in qualifying oneself as an expert witness to interpret in a legal setting is provided not only for a standard court interpreting assignment, but also for a situation that requires a Deaf interpreter because of the unique linguistic needs of the Deaf litigant.

2. **Judicial System**

The Seminar provides extensive information of practical import to working interpreters and interpreters who desire to understand the judicial system prior to interpreting from the unique perspective of a practicing local attorney who is also a trained and legally certified court interpreter. Areas of content that are explored include law enforcement procedures; courtroom procedures, protocol and logistics; the anatomy of a criminal trial; the civil judicial system; legislative and administrative quasi-judicial proceedings; federal and state legislation affecting the civil rights of Deaf and hard of hearing citizens; and, the roles and responsibilities of judicial personnel.

3. **Team Interpreting**

Participants will learn how to apply team interpreting principles that are standard practice in other interpreting settings to the legal setting. Further, participants will explore team interpreting principles unique to the legal setting, such as working with a Deaf interpreter, qualifying as an expert witness, determining the need for outside linguistic evaluations and preliminary meetings with the court and the parties.

4. **Professional Issues**

Participants will be introduced to court interpreting ethics gathered from a wide variety of state statutes, interpreting organizations and national judicial organizations, with particular emphasis upon the Code of Professional Responsibility designed by the National Center for State Courts. The roles and functions of court interpreters in relation to their ethical responsibilities is discussed and practiced. The interpreter's duty as an officer of the court versus the interpreter's duty as an expert witness is explained and applied. The interpreter's professional liability in a legal setting is emphasized.

B. Goals and Objectives

The Court Seminar is designed to familiarize the interpreter with the unique responsibility and duties of the interpreter in a legal setting. The course can be presented in different formats. Generally, it is taught in a four-day format. The course can easily be expanded; however, anything less than four days would compromise the agenda. You would need to determine what substantive areas to delete should less than four days be available for training. Further, the interpreter will gain insight into the similarities between interpreting in legal settings and interpreting in other settings.

Due to the staggering amount of information that the interpreter will be exposed to, the goal of the Seminar is not to create a competent court interpreter upon completion of the seminar. Rather, the Seminar will provide the interpreter with the areas of knowledge and skill that are necessary to competently provide interpreting services in

a legal setting. Prior to the course, participants are expected to read extensive materials that are provided by the instructor. Current and timely law review articles, journal articles, case law and other relevant information is provided to the participants approximately one month in advance for their study. The pre-readings are discussed during the seminar. The Seminar will provide interpreters with information for further individual professional growth to become qualified or to remain qualified to work in legal settings. Consequently, the interpreter should be nationally certified (or Deaf or hard of hearing). For the working court interpreter, the Seminar is designed to reinforce current appropriate behaviors and to inform the interpreter of the proper protocol for working in legal settings. The working court interpreter will leave the Seminar with the basic tools necessary for providing quality interpreting services in a legal setting.

C. **Instructional Level**

The instructional level of the seminar is advanced even though it may be the first court interpreting seminar taken by an interpreter. The Seminar is open to interpreters who are certified by the RID. Deaf interpreters do not have to be certified. If your state recognizes other national certification, then the requirement of RID certification may be negotiated and replaced with RID or other national certification. There are generally a few (defined in advance) seats available for “observers” who are generally not interpreters. These people might be ITP students or referral service coordinators. These people do not receive CEU’s nor credit for completing the course,

nor do they participate.

The Seminar is also geared to provide information to Deaf interpreters who may be novice interpreters in any setting. Because Deaf persons have had less access to traditional interpreter training and because Deaf interpreters are most frequently called upon to interpret in court, it is vitally important that this Seminar is open to them. Analysis of legal texts provides important information to Deaf and hearing interpreters, not only on legal English, but also on proper information processing in the interpreting process. Consequently, although the level of instruction is often complex; this Seminar is designed both for working court interpreters and persons who desire to work in a legal setting in the future.

D. **Target Audience**

See subsection C.

Conclusion

The above represents the areas of knowledge, content, goals and objectives, instructional level and the target audience for the Court Seminar. It is designed to be used and adapted for the reporting requirements for the RID CMP program.