

In support of SB 355

Amendment 2
Date 2-9-05
Topic SB 355

My name is Laurie Crutcher. I am a Registered Professional Reporter, which means that I have been certified to work as a court reporter by our national organization through a testing process. I have an Associate of Arts Degree and certification from college. I have been a freelance reporter in Helena since 1986, which means I work for many different agencies and private individuals.

In the year 2004, I worked in State District Courts for 78 days in six different counties, Federal Court for six days, other state agencies, such as the DEQ, for 24 days, and depositions for nine days, for a total of 117 days. I transcribed 10,770 pages on the other 248 days, and put 6,250 miles on my car for business purposes.

Each of those cases was different, varying as much as 30 percent in the time required to prepare the transcript, and with subject matter from medical testimony, to hydrology and environmental concerns, to car accidents. One trial, which I reported one week out of the four weeks it required, my total was 1,138 pages, and took me from August to November to transcribe. Costs included motels, travel, meals, equipment. I am also required to carry malpractice insurance, workers comp, and medical insurance which state employed court reporters do not. I work out of my home, and have no staff, and only one phone line. Large court reporting firms have many costs that I do not.

When I work in the district courts, I am required by statute to perform the same duties and charge the same fees as state employed court reporters.

45 percent of my income in 2004 came from court and administrative transcripts. The statute as it currently exists is vague. The uncertainty of what I will be paid for transcript preparation would make me reluctant to work in the District Courts. It is important that the Court Reporters who are State employees are able to call freelance reporters such as myself to take their places for sickness, family emergencies, vacations, or just to attend their child's school functions.

It is also important that I be able to tell someone in advance what a transcript will cost so that they can determine if they want to order it. If there is a variance of 30 percent on actual costs, that will not be possible. A flat page rate makes the costs fair and consistent for everyone, regardless of the time or technology required.

Thank you for listening. If I can be of any assistance, please contact me at 442.8262.