

IN SUPPORT OF SB 355

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SB 355

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Sharon Gaughan. I have been an official court reporter in Montana for 19 years. **I am here to urge you to support SB 355.**

What are a reporter's "actual costs" of preparation? I think if it were easily arrived at, we still wouldn't be struggling to answer that same question two years after this language was enacted. **To arrive at an accurate definition, an accountant would have to be hired. This financial burden would be placed upon each reporter in the state each year.**

The time it takes to produce a transcript for a court proceeding is the most troubling element of utilizing "actual costs" for billing purposes. **It can vary tremendously depending on the experience and efficiency of the reporter and the complexity of the case heard.** *What is a reasonable amount of time to produce a transcript and how will the reviewer of the reporter's invoices know if what is charged is actually reasonable?*

Both tough questions that will have to be answered. **Tough questions that detract from the job the reporters were hired to do, which is report the verbatim court proceedings and provide transcripts in a timely fashion.**

Let me suggest the answer to these very tough questions: Support SB355. The current system of transcript reimbursement that's been in place in Montana and utilized nationwide for many years is a per page rate. It is a system that is a win/win for the reporter, the State and the litigants and encourages and rewards efficiency. Whether that ten-page transcript takes a reporter five hours or forty, for whatever reason, the cost is the same.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.