

Misconceptions about the reporter “shortage” and easy solutions

- 1) Felony courts are not going uncovered; they are simply not always able to be covered *simultaneously*. **Staggering start times for court calendars** rather than setting all matters for 8:30 a.m. would expand the availability of official court reporters. This method has already proven successful during the height of the pandemic. The handful of “uncovered” felony courts per day are currently eventually covered by reporters who volunteer to help out the uncovered courts when their assignment reaches a lull. The shortage is greatly exaggerated.
- 2) **More effective deployment of reporters** would ease the alleged shortage. It is not uncommon for a reporter to be deployed to a courtroom where a reporter is already present or where the courtroom is dark. Mistakes happen. That extra reporter is eventually redeployed at a courtroom that then has already been reported as “uncovered,” so effectively all courtrooms get covered. The shortage is greatly exaggerated.
- 3) Courtrooms are being reported in the morning as “uncovered” if they have not yet identified a reporter who is needed to cover in the late afternoon. Those courts are eventually covered by a reporter who volunteers after finishing her assignment. The shortage is greatly exaggerated.
- 4) Returning the family law and probate courts to **privatization creates and exacerbates a shortage** in greater LA County! If all litigants are required to hire their own reporters, anywhere from four to six independent contractors report to the same courtroom to report a single matter on the calendar. This leads to fewer reporters available in the county for depositions, arbitrations, or to accept a daily assignment with the LASC (if LASC were actually hiring daily as-needed pro tem reporters, which they are not.) Each independent contractor pro tem reporter charges their client the same rate for a single calendar matter as LASC would have to pay for an daily-as needed reporter for the entire day. These daily as-needed reporters could easily be paid for if the court consistently collected the reporter user fee. The court could fix the “shortage” at zero cost; instead, it is creating one.
- 5) On the governor’s desk at this moment is a bill to allow California Court Reporters Board to license voicewriters, a type of verbatim reporter who uses a facemask to create a verbatim transcript, who can do realtime just as a stenographic reporter can. The training time for a voicewriter is about 1/3 of the time required to train a stenographic reporter. The answer to the current shortage is fixable in the long run. **More effective management and creative solutions can ease the shortage in the short term.**