

# NEWS RELEASE

## SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

### COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO



**BRANDON E. RILEY**  
Court Executive Officer

400 McAllister St.  
San Francisco, CA 94102

**Contact:** Ann E. Donlan  
[media@sftc.org](mailto:media@sftc.org)

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## **DOZENS OF LITIGANTS LEAVE SAN FRANCISCO SUPERIOR COURT WITHOUT ACCESS TO A VERBATIM RECORD AS COURT REPORTER CRISIS WIDENS DESPITE LUCRATIVE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION INCENTIVES**

**Presiding Judge Anne-Christine Massullo, Court Executive Officer Brandon E. Riley Urge Senate Appropriations Committee to Support SB 662 to Expand Electronic Recording to all Civil Cases**

The Court currently has 15 vacancies for court reporters – and despite generous recruitment and retention incentives, including a \$30,000 signing bonus – the Court was unable to hire even one new Certified Shorthand Reporter (CSR) in all of 2023, Presiding Judge Anne-Christine Massullo and Court Executive Officer (CEO) Brandon E. Riley announced today.

The Court seeks, when possible, to provide CSR coverage for family law proceedings – a non-mandated case type for CSR coverage under state law. However, the shortage has reached a crisis level in San Francisco, leaving just 24 full-time CSRs to cover 28 departments, including courtrooms handling felony criminal matters. Unfortunately, in 2023, there were 24 days when CSRs were unavailable to staff family law courtrooms.

“It is essential to find a remedy to close this chasm of injustice that fails litigants who cannot afford to hire their own CSR while favoring others with the financial means to pay a court reporter to take a verbatim record of their day in court,” Presiding Judge Massullo said. “Without an accurate and

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## **SB 662**

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complete transcript, parties who do not have access to an official transcript are for all practical purposes unable to meaningfully exercise their right to an appeal. Every day of delay in passage of SB 662 entrenches a two-tiered system of justice in our court system. Together we can solve this crisis.”

[SB 662](#) is scheduled for a vote on January 17.

According to SSB 662:

- California courts currently employ about 1,200 full-time court reporters. To provide CSRs in mandated cases, courts estimate they will need to hire approximately 650 new court reporters.
- Over 50 percent of California courts have reported that they do not have CSRs to routinely cover nonmandated cases, including civil, family law, and probate cases, and over 30 percent can never provide CSRs in those cases. Currently, 74.5 percent of courts are actively recruiting official court reporters to fill vacancies throughout California.
- Although indigent litigants are entitled to a CSR free of charge, courts are increasingly unable to fulfill those requests. Instead, indigent litigants, including those seeking domestic violence restraining orders, emergency custody orders, and elder abuse and civil harassment protection orders, are forced to choose whether to proceed with their matter without a verbatim record or to return to court at a later date when a CSR may be available.
- In 2022, the Legislature appropriated \$32,000,000 for courts to recruit, hire, and retain CSRs. These funds are meant for courts to offer salary raises, bonuses, and educational benefits to incentivize becoming a court reporter.

“Efforts to support our existing cadre of CSRs coupled with our dedication to recruiting, hiring and retaining new CSRs demonstrates the Court’s commitment to doing everything possible to support these highly trained professionals and value their critical role in access to justice in San Francisco,” CEO Riley said. “The Court is leveraging \$703,092 in state funding this year for retention of CSR staff and recruitment of new hires. The Court’s permanent CSRs received a 5 percent base rate increase this year, increasing their top step salary to \$149,613 – one of the highest salaries in the state for court reporters. Despite this generous package of pay and benefits, including offering a \$30,000 signing bonus to any newly hired CSR, the Court has been unable to add even one additional court reporter to our ranks. We are clearly at a tipping point.”

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This crisis is not unique to San Francisco: the numbers of total licensed CSRs indicate there are fewer and fewer professionals statewide to take advantage of these financial incentives. As of July 1, 2023, there were 4,752 California-licensed court reporters residing in the state. However, according to the California Department of Consumer Affairs, between FY 2013–14 and FY 2021–22, the number of total licensees has declined 19.2% and the number of new license applications has declined 70.1%.

CEO Riley added, “The Court always prefers to assign CSRs to take the official record of proceedings. However, in anticipation of legislative approval to extend the authority to electronically record all civil proceedings, the unrelenting shortage of CSRs in California made it clear to court leadership that it was imperative to prepare for a technology solution to remedy these unacceptable disparities in access to justice. To date, the Court has already spent \$658,000 to equip 48 courtrooms with the electronic recording (ER) technology to produce reliable and accurate verbatim records of proceedings. As a result, no additional funds would be required to buy or install these ER systems in our Court. These systems could be used immediately to abate the crisis if the Legislature permits electronic reporting in any civil proceeding.”

State Senator Susan Rubio introduced SB 662.

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