

Court Reporter Self-Funded Expenses in California

Unlike most California public employees, court reporters must personally pay for a wide variety of technology, and even staffing, in order to perform their dual role of court employee to capture the verbatim record and private contractor to produce transcripts. The California Government Code has been interpreted to prohibit the courts from supplying stenotype equipment, transcription equipment and related supplies to court reporters (see text provided, below).

Charts on page 2 detail the various costs that court reporters pay from personal funds. These annual and start-up costs are as high as \$23,000 or more for technology, equipment and supplies, and could run as high as \$15,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 or more for staffing. The choice to hire transcript production staff differs from reporter to reporter and the decision is largely driven by the amount of transcript workload. A reporter could decide to hire only a scopist (editor of stenographic notes), only a proofreader, both or neither. There is no choice when it comes to technology, equipment and supplies – these are necessary and ongoing costs.

Accordingly, court reporters have made a significant investment in technology and productivity, which benefits the court in the form of low cost and rapid transcript production. For instance, *in the last 100 years* court-paid transcript reimbursement costs have increased only 325% for original and 50% for copies, while the consumer price index during this period has increased 2,000%. Court reporters have not received any increase in transcript fees in over 12 years.

California Government Code Sections 70311 (a)-(b) and 70313

Gov Code Section 70311 (a)-(b)

(a) Commencing July 1, 1997, and each year thereafter, no county or city and county is responsible to provide funding for "court operations," as defined in Section 77003 and Rule 810 of the California Rules of Court, as it read on July 1, 1996.

(b) Except as provided in Section 70312, commencing as of July 1, 1996, and each year thereafter, each county or city and county shall be responsible for providing necessary and suitable facilities for judicial and court support positions created prior to July 1, 1996. In determining whether facilities are necessary and suitable, the reasonable needs of the court and the fiscal condition of the county or city and county shall be taken into consideration.

Gov Code Section 70313 (full text)

This chapter may not be construed as authorizing a county, a city and county, a court, the Judicial Council, or the state to supply to the official reporters of the courts stenography, stenotype, or other shorthand machines, or as authorizing the supply to the official reporters of the courts, for use in the preparation of transcripts, of typewriters, transcribing equipment, supplies, or other personal property. The enactment of this provision is a statement of existing law under former subdivision (f) of Section 68073 and is not a modification of the prior law.

A detailed breakdown of court reporter-paid costs is as follows:

STAFF COSTS

Annual Volume of Transcript Production	Scopist (85¢ per page)	Proof Reader (40¢ per page)
1,000 pages	\$850 per year	\$400 per year
5,000 pages	\$4,250 per year	\$2,000 per year
10,000 pages	\$8,500 per year	\$4,000 per year
25,000 pages	\$21,250 per year	\$10,000 per year
NOTE: The decision as to whether to hire a scopist (editor of stenographic notes) and/or a proof reader is optional and differs from reporter to reporter, and the decision is largely workload driven.		

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLY COSTS

Hardware, Software, Supplies, Etc. (replacement cycle indicated in parentheses)	Initial Cost	Annual Cost
Software: Computer-aided transcript software (3-4 years)	\$4000	
Software: Billing software (3-4 years)	100	
Hardware: Stenotype machine (5 years)	4800	
Hardware: Laptop computer (3-4 years)	2250	
Hardware: Desktop computer (3-4 years)	1000	
Hardware: Printers (quantity = 2) (4-5 years)	2000	
Hardware: Photocopier (leased)		\$3000
Hardware: Fax Machine (5 years)	130	
Supplies: Copy paper, 13 boxes X \$30		390
Supplies: Stenotype machine cartridge ribbons (\$15 x 3)		45
Supplies: Stenotype machine carrying case (7 years)	295	
Supplies: Printer toner \$80 x 3		240
Supplies: Cables, serial converter, connectors (5 years)	125	
Supplies: Fax Toner \$35 x 4		140
Supplies: Binding Equipment/Supplies: Transcript cover/back (6 boxes per year @ \$40 per box of 100+shipping)		300
Supplies: Office supplies, "original" and "copy" stamps, packaging tape, diskettes, address labels, research materials, business cards, CDs, envelopes		550
Other: Stenotype machine: Annual maintenance		295
Other: Support for software, including updates		600
Other: Internet provider		300
Other: Wheeler (to carry transcript, supplies, etc.) (5 yrs)	70	
Other: Furniture (for home office) (6 years)	500	
Other: Training – Seminars		300
Other: Training - Vendor training		200
Other: Postage		250
Other: Professional dues		400
Other: CSR license		100
Other: Equipment Insurance		225
Other: Cell phone		468
Other: Professional Liability Insurance		259
Investment in equipment and supplies	\$15,270	
Annual ongoing costs	\$8,062	
Combined costs (start-up and annual)	\$23,332	