



65 Enterprise
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656
949-715-4682
(949) 715-6931 Fax
www.cal-ccra.org
info@cal-ccra.org

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Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

On behalf of the 2,000 men and women currently working as official reporters in California's courts and the more than 8,000 court reporters licensed in the state, I am appalled by your recent comments on National Public Radio that many in our industry can be replaced by machines. You have been provided bad information that, if adopted by the state Legislature, threatens the court's ability to operate efficiently as well as provide access to justice for the consumer.

The Administrative Office of the Courts is not in favor of replacing reporters with recording devices. Neither are judges. While electronic recording is now being used in low volume transcript courts, the AOC has repeatedly stated that using digital devices in felony and civil cases, family law, and trials involving sexually violent predators is simply "too risky." After removing these high volume transcript courts from the LAO's proposal, the state will save nothing. Governor, you are wasting time and energy pursuing an ill-advised proposal.

Other states have tried electronic recording in court proceedings, but most have elected to return to using court reporters because recordings caused court delays, increased costs, and equipment failures that result in expensive retrials. Further, transcription of recorded proceedings is more expensive. These states include Texas, New Mexico, New York, Kentucky, Illinois and some Federal courts. Other states, including Florida and Oregon, are currently rethinking their decision to move to machines.

Court Reporters have been using digital technology for over 20 years now, long before recordings became digital. Court reporters are the fastest, most efficient, and most accurate way to transform the spoken word to text, and all this technology is provided at the individual expense of the court reporters. Elimination of a workforce that is made up of 98% females, many with children to support, would be not only shortsighted but morally questionable.

Your proposal flies in the face of the needs of deaf and hearing-impaired judges, attorneys, and litigants who rely on the services of court reporters every day. A tape recorder is useless for these individuals.

Governor, I concede that, at least in Hollywood, machines often out-perform humans, but not in the case of well-trained and effective officials of the court. I am proud of my profession and the high quality product our men and women provide California's legal system on a daily basis.

Sincerely,

Sheri Turner Gray
President