



**California Healthcare Interpreters Association**  
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February 4, 2003

SF Health Commission  
SF City and County Administration  
City Hall  
San Francisco, CA

Dear Commissioners,

On behalf of CHIA, I want to raise a voice in opposition to the budget cuts that interpreter positions at SF General Hospital. I am Terry Bautista, CHIA's Vice-President and Chief Editor of the CHIA Newsletter. CHIA is a statewide association of over 400 members, individuals and corporations. Our mission is:

**To Increase Equal Access to Healthcare for All by**

- \* Developing and promoting the healthcare interpreter profession
- \* Advocating for culturally and linguistically appropriate services
- \* Providing education and training to healthcare professionals

Healthcare and medical interpretation have been available in this and other bay area county hospitals for two decades. Title VI the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandates cultural and language services. County hospitals are known for having up to 50% or more of their patient populations to be limited and non-English speaking. County hospitals see the poorest and most vulnerable of our residents, people who wait until their symptoms and diseases are far advanced, people who fear negative consequences of seeking public services, people who live under dire conditions that impact their quality of life and often the safety of the public.

In the past twenty years, as health and wellness advocates have established, built capacity, and institutionalized cultural and linguistic services here and throughout the country, it has been an uphill battle ----- lone voices in large bureaucracies, undaunted hospital and medical professionals raising the torch of Access held high. The glimmer of light for immigrants, refugees, and the very sick and disadvantaged will lose its strength, if not snuffed out, if

cutbacks in the area of healthcare interpretation begin to roll out. It is only in the last five years that the medical industry has even acknowledged that trained interpreters will result in desired health outcomes, more accurate diagnoses, and satisfactory patient compliance and wellness.

We cannot turn back the steady, but difficult, advances that have bolstered the support and provision of medical interpretation. Yes, there are other aids, like Language Line Services that can be used in place of on-site medical interpreters, yet it may not be the most cost-effective means to cover the continuous demand for language assistance, nor appropriate in cases of death and dying or trauma.

Lastly, SFGH collaborated with Alameda County Medical Center on Videoconferencing Medical Interpretation, a cutting-edge enhancement to provide interpreters on-line by computer in a timely, real-time method. This enhancement is now gaining the attention of many institutions as another alternative for quality access to language support. The next phase of VMI is just beginning.

Thank you for taking the time for my testimony today. I trust that when you weigh all the human factors and the need for improved health outcomes, you will retain interpreter services at SF General at its current capacity.

Sincerely,

Teresita Bautista, CHIA Vice President

CC: CHIA Board of Directors