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To: Mark Daley
Chief Operating Officer
thebigword Group
4 Royd's Close
Lower Wortley
Leeds LS12 6LL

CC Julie Parkin HMCTS

Date: 6th July 2023

Dear Mark,

We are writing to express concern over The Big Word's (TBW) recent announcements of changes to fees and terms offered to Public Service Interpreters (PSIs) on assignment for the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Stakeholders in public service interpreting are expressing increasingly vocal disappointment and disillusionment following communications from TBW dated 27 June and 29 June 2023 (for 'clarification'), outlining mainly:

- sudden and immediate withdrawal of payments PSIs have come to rely on;
- changes to minimum booking-time and cancellation policies;
- trumpeting of increases in headline fees, whilst, at the same time, more quietly removing or degrading booking terms (initially to include **face-to-face and CVP**).

Should these sudden proposed changes be implemented, they would spell a severe cut in income for PSIs who deliver interpreting services via CVP, leaving highly skilled, but poorly paid professional practitioners, genuinely struggling to make ends meet.

We understand the pressures Language Service Providers (LSPs) operate under, balancing:

- contractual arrangements with the MOJ;
- delivering profits, dividends, and shareholder value to owners; and
- engaging with interpreters who deliver the service.

We recognise your commitment to the provision of language services in the public sector, and to public service work overall, as well as your willingness to deliver a professional service, not only for TBW owners and the MOJ, but also for qualified and experienced public

service interpreters.

We also know that poor rates and terms imposed by public service contracts have led to an **increase in off-contract engagements**, due to the pressure you are under to ensure assignments are fulfilled at competitive rates.

What PSIs need:

- An alignment of work/pay conditions between Police/Home Office and MOJ work

Higher quality qualifications and experience standards are being demanded in Police and Home Office settings. This is leading to higher fees and better terms and conditions now delivered on Police contracts as well for Home Office assignments. But elsewhere, we seem to be moving further from protecting professionalism.

- reasonable hourly rates;
- realistic minimum bookings (3 hours for face-to-face);
- proper terms for cancellation, and
- respect and recognition.

We believe appropriate pay for PSIs is at the heart of everything we all want to achieve, especially given the proposed new framework for the MOJ which sets the bar much higher for qualifications and experience.

At the most basic level, remuneration commensurate with qualifications, skills and experience, will enable interpreters to make a decent living in this vital work. Otherwise, they will continue to leave the profession, and it will become harder and harder for you to fulfil MOJ interpreting requirements, and your contractual commitments.

PI4J came together last year to set out our view on what would constitute reasonable pay and conditions in the present market:

<https://pi4j.org.uk/news/guidance-on-rates-for-police-interpreters/>

This guidance by no means reflects what we, or the wider family of stakeholders, think PSIs should be paid. This is merely a statement of what we believe to be a realistic balance between pressures on public spending, constraints on LSPs, and minimum needs of PSIs.

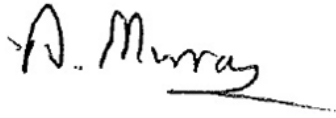
Recent developments such as TBW's communications of 27 and 29 June 2023 suggest we are heading in the wrong direction when it comes to MOJ work.

We know there is scope to review rates as we head towards the new 2025 contract, and we welcome this; but it may be too late unless we act now. Giving just a few days' notice of changes to earnings is an unacceptable practice. We need to **improve** remuneration and conditions in the here and now rather than **reduce** them.

We stand ready to support TBW in any effort or discussion with the contracting authorities. We will happily make the case for better, fairer pay and work conditions needed to sustain

high quality service delivery, and to support justice and public safety.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

Andy Murray

Unite the Union on behalf of PI4J