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October 4, 2024

VIA E-MAIL AND U.S. MAIL

Clerk of the Wisconsin Supreme Court
Attn: Deputy Clerk-Rules
P.O. Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701-1688
E-Mail: clerk@wicourts.gov

Re: *Rule Petition 24-02, In the Matter of Creating Wis. Stat. § 885.375 Relating to Interpreters in Municipal Court Proceedings*

Dear Honorable Justices:

On behalf of the Wisconsin Hispanic Lawyers Association (WHLA), I write in support of Supreme Court Rule Petition 24-02 which would require municipal courts to provide interpreters to individuals with limited English proficiency.

The mission of WHLA is twofold: advance the professional development of its members and advocate on issues of interest to the Hispanic community. WHLA supports the adoption of Rule Petition 24-02 because it directly advances WHLA's mission by providing individuals with limited English proficiency ("LEP individuals")—including individuals in the Hispanic community—with the ability to meaningfully participate in their own legal proceedings.

Spanish is the most widely spoken language by Wisconsin residents with limited English proficiency.¹ As many of WHLA's members know from personal experience, translating legal proceedings from English to Spanish is a specialized skill that requires professional training and expertise. For this reason, litigants in municipal hearings should not be forced to rely upon friends and family members for translation services when their legal rights are in jeopardy. To ensure procedural fairness, LEP individuals should be provided with translators regardless of their ability

¹ 58% of Wisconsin's LEP population speaks Spanish, following by Hmong at 10%. Language Access Plan, WISCONSIN DIRECTOR OF STATE COURTS, at 5 (December 2021), *available at* <https://www.wicourts.gov/services/interpreter/docs/laplan.pdf>.

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to afford these services. And as the Hispanic population in Wisconsin continues to grow,² WHLA anticipates a continuing and increased need for qualified translators in municipal court proceedings.

For these reasons, WHLA encourages the Court to adopt Rule Petition 24-02 to allow LEP individuals to understand and participate in municipal legal proceedings and ensure that their due process rights are protected.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Nancy Cruz

Nancy Cruz, President
Wisconsin Hispanic Lawyers Association

² Between 2010 and 2022, the Hispanic population in Wisconsin experienced the most growth of any racial or ethnic group. *Our Changing Population: Wisconsin, USA* FACTS, <https://usafacts.org/data/topics/people-society/population-and-demographics/our-changing-population/state/wisconsin/> (last visited Sept. 28, 2024).