

STATE OF TEXAS

RESOLUTION

of the

TEXAS JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Judicial Resources Committee Judicial Professions Recommendations

WHEREAS, the Texas Judicial Council was created under Chapter 71, Texas Government Code and is charged with improving the administration of justice; and

WHEREAS, the Council has charged its Judicial Resources Committee with studying existing judicial resources and whether enhancements are needed; and

WHEREAS, since FY 2005 through the end of FY 2026, the number of certified shorthand reporters declined 12%, while the number of courts of record increased by 15%; and

WHEREAS, many courts, particularly in rural and non-urban areas, face challenges in recruiting and retaining official court reporters; and

WHEREAS, these workforce constraints affect both the availability and cost of creating the official record of court proceedings; and

WHEREAS, HB 16 of the 89th Second Special Session directed OCA to conduct a study on digital court recording, including cost, access, accuracy, and effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, presently, candidates to become a certified shorthand reporter must take a two-part exam developed and administered by the Texas Court Reporter Association under contract with the Judicial Branch Certification Commission; and

WHEREAS, judicial professions are overseen by the Judicial Branch Certification Commission,

WHEREAS, court recorders perform a fundamentally different role from certified shorthand reporters, and their qualifications should reflect those differences; and

WHEREAS, the cost of transcript and related fees are creating access to justice concerns for litigants; and

WHEREAS, transcript preparation fees vary substantially among courts and jurisdictions, yet fee information is not consistently available to the public; and

WHEREAS, digital court recording is already used in a variety of settings throughout Texas and other states; and

WHEREAS, a pilot grant program would allow courts to test digital recording systems in real-world courtroom environments and provide meaningful information regarding cost, reliability, operational challenges, transcript preparation, and the impact on court proceedings; and

WHEREAS, across all stakeholder groups participating in the study, there is strong agreement that a trained human must be present to monitor any recording, and that centralized multi-courtroom monitoring does not provide adequate protection to assure the accuracy of the digital recording;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Texas Judicial Council respectfully recommends that the Legislature:

1. Amend Government Code Section 154.103 to accept passing scores on skills tests offered by the National Court Reporters Association and the National Voice Reporters Association in lieu of passing Part A of the Texas certification examination (the skills test);
2. Require courts to post on their public website the fee schedule detailing all fees charged related to providing a transcript, including expedited service and copy fees; and
3. Establish a pilot grant program to support the use of digital court recording in interested trial courts and require participating courts to report on the benefits, challenges, costs, and operational impacts of digital recording systems.



Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Chairman, Texas Judicial Council