



ASSOCIATION OF LANGUAGE COMPANIES

February 2020

ALC Statement of Position on Worker Classification and the Language Services Industry

The Association of Language Companies, a 501 (c)(6) trade association headquartered in the United States, affirms its commitment to advocating for the just creation and application of laws in regard to worker classification among language service industry professionals and asserts its dedication to advocate for the independence of all professional linguists with influencers and legislators on both a federal, and state-by-state basis. The ALC welcomes the opportunity to represent language service companies, language service industry professionals, in addition to any and all language industry groups, as a collective voice on this topic. **To that end, the ALC strongly requests that a specific exemption be made for professional translators and interpreters.**

Regarding worker classification and for the purposes of enacting fair and just laws as they relate to independent contractors and employees, the ALC does not believe it to be correct that language industry professionals should be grouped together with “gig economy” workers, such as ride-share or meal delivery drivers. Professional linguists – such as interpreters, translators, narrators, and other language service professionals – are highly-skilled and educated professionals that are more accurately considered part of the “knowledge economy”. The long-standing practice within the United States of individual language professionals engaging with multiple agencies as independent contractors to help people communicate has been in place for over 70 years.

The passage and implementation of Assembly Bill 5 in California as a sweeping measure to reclassify workers, directly impedes language industry professionals' rights to the independence that they have deservedly enjoyed for decades. Though it may be appropriate for some workers in the language industry to be recognized as employees, based on the nature of their working relationship with organizations that they engage with, the ALC asserts that it is categorically wrong to change the status of virtually all workers in the industry to that of employees, thereby taking away their rights to work as independent contractors.

To rectify this situation in California, the correct move on the part of legislators would be to amend the law in California by enacting an exemption from AB5 for professionals in the language industry, restoring their freedom of choice to work as independent contractors, or employees.

This is not a partisan issue, nor is it an issue where the professionals of the industry and the agencies they contract with do not see eye-to-eye. **Language professionals and the companies that engage with them are in lock-step agreement that an exemption is appropriate.** At a federal level, the American Translators Association has released a statement of position to this effect, and at a state level in California, the Coalition of Practicing Translators & Interpreters of California – both organizations representing industry professionals – have stated clearly that an exemption for the language industry is the best result for all stakeholders involved.

Representing approximately 200 language service companies in the US and internationally, the ALC maintains that the differentiation between workers in the “Gig Economy” versus the “Knowledge Economy” is critically important. The gig economy focuses on platforms, not talent; the knowledge

economy (of which the language industry is a key part) focuses on talent, skills and knowledge, not platforms. Language service professionals have mastery of more than one of the approximate 6,500 languages spoken globally, plus they possess additional skill sets that allow a bridge between a multitude of disciplines, like healthcare, law, business, education, technology and more. These language professionals are highly skilled and educated individuals similar to the other professionals who have received exemption status under existing legislation, such as attorneys and doctors.

The global Language Service Industry was reportedly worth US \$46.52 billion in 2018 and is expecting to grow to US \$56 billion by 2021.¹ Demand is on the rise for these sophisticated services and opportunities abound for interpreters and translators alike. The ALC maintains that the freedom for each language professional to choose how he or she engages in this market will afford the best synergy between talent and opportunity.

¹<https://www.statista.com/topics/2152/language-services-industry-in-the-us/>