

NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF TRANSLATORS & INTERPRETERS

Te Rōpū Kaiwhakamāori ā-waha, ā-tuhi o Aotearoa

Hon. Mark Mitchell

Minister of Police

By email: M.Mitchell@ministers.govt.nz

Regarding: Systemic Support for Professional Interpreting Standards in New Zealand Police Operations

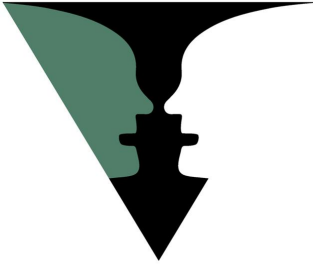
Dear Minister,

The New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters (NZSTI), the national professional body representing professional translators and interpreters across Aotearoa New Zealand, writes to formally and unequivocally endorse the correspondence recently sent to your office by Esther Kontze regarding the use of unqualified bilingual individuals in police assignments.

Our member's letter outlines the profound operational and legal risks that arise when unqualified bilingual individuals are called upon to interpret in critical, complex settings, such as victim statement-taking. Under these circumstances, NZSTI wishes to advocate for professional standards and systemic integrity in language access.

A core part of our role is to work alongside government agencies to promote the understanding of a critical distinction: bilingualism refers to a passive language ability, whereas interpreting is a highly cognitive and professional discipline requiring dedicated training, specialised expertise, and adherence to professional standards. When New Zealand Police relies on unqualified bilingual individuals, there is a greater risk that information will be misunderstood, omitted, altered, or influenced by personal assumptions, weakening the systemic safeguards our justice system depends on.

Instead, engaging qualified professional interpreters upholds the integrity of legal and law enforcement processes. Professional interpreters are trained to provide accurate communication, helping to ensure that individuals understand their rights and that evidence can be relied upon. NZSTI represents the highest standards of professional interpreting in Aotearoa New Zealand, and working with NZSTI members is a reliable way to meet those standards. For this purpose, NZSTI maintains a directory of qualified interpreters, freely accessible to the public. Engaging an NZSTI member means working with a professional who meets the following professional standards:



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- adheres to a national code of ethics, guaranteeing accuracy, confidentiality and competence;
- holds qualifications and certifications that ensure the interpreter can handle high-stress, legally complex and emotionally charged environments without introducing bias, omissions or distortions;
- undertakes continuous professional development to keep interpreting skills sharp and aligned with modern theory and practice.

When public sector agencies call on unqualified individuals in high-stakes settings, this undermines both the extensive training of professional interpreters and the rights of those who rely on interpreters to communicate across languages. More critically, it risks the integrity of police investigations, the admissibility of evidence and the safety of vulnerable victims and witnesses.

NZSTI fully supports our member's request for a formal review of language service procurement within the New Zealand Police. We advocate for a mandate requiring that only qualified professional interpreters be engaged for all police work involving language assistance. In progressing this work, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with New Zealand Police to help establish robust language-access policies, ensuring access to vetted, professional interpreters who protect the integrity of investigations and the communities that are served.

Thank you for your time and serious consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Agustina Marianacci
President

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