



U.S. Department of Justice

Civil Rights Division

*Federal Coordination and Compliance Section
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW-NWB
Washington, DC 20530*

April 21, 2016

Honorable Paul A. Suttell
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Rhode Island
Licht Judicial Complex
250 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: DJ # 171-66-2

Dear Chief Justice Suttell:

I am pleased to notify you that the U.S. Department of Justice, through the Federal Coordination and Compliance Section of the Civil Rights Division, has determined that the Rhode Island Judiciary (RIJ) has fulfilled the terms of the Voluntary Resolution Agreement that resolved our investigation under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Through this letter, we are closing the file on this matter and completing our engagement.

I appreciate your ongoing leadership and personal involvement in improving the Court's delivery of comprehensive, statewide language assistance in the interests of justice. State Court Administrator J. Joseph Baxter, Jr., General Counsel Erika Kruse Weller, Deputy Administrator Gail Valuk, Office of Court Interpreters Coordinator Susana Torres, and other staff dedicated considerable efforts working with my staff and implementing the Agreement, Executive Order 2012-05, and the provisions of the April 2014 Language Access Plan (LAP). The benefits for limited English proficient court users, the public, and the court itself are substantial and enduring.

In the Agreement dated April 9, 2014, the Department approved the LAP, which outlined the efforts to be undertaken in order to ensure comprehensive language assistance throughout the court system as mandated by Executive Order 2012-05. The Executive Order, which you issued after the provisions were negotiated with my office, required that the courts provide appropriate language assistance at no cost to limited English proficient persons in all proceedings and court operations and outlined the manner in which the RIJ would gather data, respond to complaints, and provide annual monitoring reports to the public. The Agreement required RIJ to comply with Title VI, implement the Executive Order and LAP, continue to gather feedback from the Language Access Committee, and continue periodic discussions with us on implementation and any needed changes.

The Agreement included a two-year monitoring period, throughout which my staff and yours have worked to resolve implementation issues, including those found during a visit to the Licht Courthouse in February 2015. After the 2015 issues were corrected, the Deputy State

Court Administrator delivered to us on March 10 a certification that RIJ has complied with all other requirements of the Executive Order, LAP, and Agreement, and committed RIJ to “permanently retain its policy of providing appropriate, qualified language assistance in all proceedings and court operations at no cost to limited English proficient persons in accordance with the terms” of those documents. Because RIJ has complied with the agreed upon conditions, we are closing the case.

We are obligated to notify you that this letter relates only to the complaint referred to above; it does not address other actual or potential claims of discrimination that may arise from the activities of the RIJ. This letter also does not affect any rights that the complainant may have to file a private lawsuit regarding the concerns raised in its complaint to DOJ. We will retain the complaint for our records and take the information provided into account if we receive similar future complaints against the RIJ.

We are further obligated to inform you that recipients of federal financial assistance may not intimidate, threaten, coerce, or engage in other discriminatory conduct against anyone who has either taken action or participated in an action to secure rights protected by the civil rights laws DOJ enforces. The protection against retaliation extends to recipient employees who provide information or otherwise cooperate with DOJ’s review. Any individual who alleges such harassment or intimidation may file a complaint with DOJ. We would investigate such a complaint if the situation warrants.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, it may be necessary to release information, related correspondence, and records shared by recipients and complainants upon request. In the event that we receive such a request, we will seek to protect, to the extent provided by law, personal information that, if released, could constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Thank you for your cooperation in resolving this matter. If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact attorney Paul M. Uyehara at paul.uyehara@usdoj.gov or (202) 305-9813.

Sincerely,



Christine Stoneman
Acting Chief

cc: Peter F. Neronha
United States Attorney

J. Joseph Baxter, Jr.
State Court Administrator

Erika Kruse Weller
General Counsel