
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1242 (Nguyen) - Language access

Version: July 9, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

Policy Vote: HEALTH 10 - 0, G.O. 11 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Agnes Lee

Bill Summary: AB 1242 would revise and expand requirements under the state's Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act and require the California Health and Human Services Agency to designate a Language Access Director.

Fiscal Impact:

- The California Health and Human Services Agency estimates General Fund costs to range between \$8 million to \$10 million in 2025-26 and annually thereafter. This includes, but is not limited to, staffing costs within the agency and its departments to fulfill the expansion of the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act and contracting costs to cover translation, language interpretation, or web content translation services. The agency also anticipates cost pressures related to requirements for a Language Access Director, language access plan development, implementation, and targeted outreach and marketing efforts.

The agency indicates that while \$20 million was allocated in 2021-22 to the agency to conduct language access work, all of the funding has been committed and will be drawn down by the end of 2025-26.

- The California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) estimates a one-time cost of \$1,398,000 (General Fund and Central Service Cost Recovery Fund) for state operations for developing, programming, testing, and validating a system to collect, review, and report on departmental needs assessments, as well as the provision of instruction and technical assistance.
- The Department of Industrial Relations estimates ongoing costs of \$1.8 million to \$2.4 million per year, in addition to a one-time cost of \$2.4 million to \$3.6 million, for state operations (various special funds). The one-time cost would cover translation of materials/forms into multiple languages.
- The California Air Resources Board (CARB) estimates ongoing annual costs of \$589,000 for state operations (Air Pollution Control Fund).
- The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) anticipates General Fund cost pressures in the low-to-mid hundreds of thousands of dollars for staffing resources due to increase workload and General Fund cost pressures, potentially in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, for the procurement of translation services.

- The California Water Boards indicates that while the precise impacts of this bill are uncertain, an initial estimate is that the State Water Board would require an additional \$500,000 annually for language translation, funded from all eligible fund sources using the Board's indirect cost methodology.

Background: California's Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act provides for effective communication between all levels of government and people in the state who are precluded from utilizing public services because of language barriers. The law requires:

- Every state agency which serves a substantial number of non-English-speaking people and which provides materials in English explaining services to also provide the same type of materials in any non-English language spoken by a substantial number of the public served by the agency.
- A state agency must distribute the applicable written materials in the appropriate non-English language through its statewide and local offices or facilities to non-English-speaking persons, or, as an alternative, the state agency may instead elect to furnish translation aids, translation guides, or provide assistance, through use of a qualified bilingual person, at its statewide and local offices or facilities in completing English forms or questionnaires and in understanding English forms, letters, or notices, as specified.
- A "substantial number of non-English-speaking people" means members of a group who either do not speak English, or who are unable to effectively communicate in English because it is not their native language, and who comprise 5 percent or more of the people served by the statewide or any local office or facility of a state agency.
- Each agency must conduct a language survey of each of its statewide and local offices, which, among other items, must include a detailed description of the agency's procedures for identifying language needs at statewide and local offices and assigning qualified bilingual staff to those offices. The Department of Human Resources must review the results of the surveys and provide a report to the Legislature every two years.

Proposed Law: Specific provisions of the bill would:

- Add to the definition of "substantial number of non-English-speaking people" for purposes of the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act, to also include people eligible to be served by the statewide or any local office or facility of a state agency, as determined by data, as specified.
- Require the California Health and Human Services Agency to designate a Language Access Director to provide critical oversight, accountability, and coordination across various state departments and agencies to ensure individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing have meaningful access to government programs and services; and specify the duties of the director.
- Require each department and office within the California Health and Human Services Agency to do both of the following:

- Develop a Language Access Plan, as described.
- Delegate a coordinator to work with the Language Access Director.

Related Legislation: SB 1078 (Min, 2024) would have established the Office of Language Access within the California Health and Human Services Agency. The bill was held on the suspense file in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

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