
CONSENT

Bill No: AB 2341
Author: Fong (D), et al.
Amended: 6/23/26 in Senate
Vote: 27 - Urgency

SENATE EMERGENCY MGT. COMMITTEE: 9-0, 6/16/26

AYES: Stern, Seyarto, Allen, Blakespear, Grayson, Grove, McNerney, Pérez, Rubio

SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/1/26

AYES: Durazo, Choi, Arreguín, Ashby, Cervantes, Laird, Seyarto

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-0, 5/14/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Local government: emergency response services: use of languages other than English

SOURCE: California State Association of Counties

DIGEST: This bill revises existing requirements for a local agency that provides emergency response services to translate information related to an emergency into non-English languages, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Requires, in the event of an emergency within its jurisdiction, a local agency that provides emergency response services to provide information related to the emergency in English and in all non-English languages if the following thresholds are met:
 - a) The local agency serves a population within which 5% or more of the people speak English less than “very well;” and,

- b) The language other than English is spoken jointly by the 5% or more of the population that speaks English less than “very well.”
- 2) Directs each local agency to use data from the American Community Survey (ACS), or an equally reliable source to determine which languages meet the thresholds in 1) above, by January 1, 2025.
- 3) Requires each local agency to reassess the data every five years to ensure that the language or languages in which the local agency provides information is consistent with the above requirements.
- 4) Requires a local agency providing translated information to do both of the following:
 - a) Ensure the quality of the information that is provided to individuals speaking English less than “very well” is as comprehensive, actionable, and timely as the information provided to English-speaking persons; and,
 - b) Attempt to utilize community members with the cultural competencies and language skills necessary to effectively communicate with those that speak English less than “very well” whenever feasible, as specified.
- 5) Requires the Office of Planning and Research to survey a sample of local agencies every three years to determine the extent to which they are complying with the above requirements and report the findings to the Legislature, commencing January 1, 2027.
- 6) Establishes the California Emergency Services Act (ESA), which designates the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) as the lead agency responsible for the state’s emergency and disaster response services for natural, technological, or man-made disasters and emergencies.
- 7) Establishes legislative intent that translating emergency notifications into the most commonly spoken language other than English is a critically important governmental activity.
- 8) Requires Cal OES to create a library of translated emergency notifications that may be used by designated alerting authorities when issuing emergency notifications and to consider the two most commonly spoken languages other than English in the state when creating the library.

- 9) Requires designated alerting authorities to consider using the library and other specified materials when issuing emergency notifications to the public.
- 10) Establishes the Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act, which states legislative intent to provide for effective communication between all levels of government in California and the people of California who are precluded from utilizing public services because of language barriers.
- 11) Requires every state agency which serves a substantial number of non-English-speaking people and 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.
- 12) Defines “a substantial number of non-English speaking people” to mean members of a group who either do not speak English or are unable to effectively communicate in English because it is not their native language, and who comprise 5% or more of the people served by the state agency or any of its local offices or facilities.

This bill:

- 1) Provides that a local agency shall translate information related to an emergency within its jurisdiction if 5% or more of the population within its jurisdiction speak English less than “very well.”
- 2) Specifies that a determination of the 5% threshold in 1) above shall be based on data according to the ACS or from an equally reliable source.
- 3) Clarifies that a local agency must provide translated information related to the emergency in each language spoken by 5% or more of the population that speaks English less than “very well.”
- 4) Provides that a local agency shall determine whether a language meets the criteria for translation, as specified, and deletes the existing requirement that the determination be made by January 1, 2025.
- 5) Clarifies that a local agency is not prohibited from adopting more expansive standards than those set forth in this bill.

- 6) Makes other minor technical and clarifying changes.
- 7) Contains an urgency clause.

Background

Threshold languages. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, roughly 44% of Californians speak a language other than English at home. Within the population in California served by Medi-Cal, the state's public health insurance program, roughly 38% speak a language other than English as their primary spoken language. The most frequently reported languages among Medi-Cal's non-English speakers are Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Armenian. More than 200 languages are spoken in California.

The Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act, Chapter 1182, Statutes of 1973, is intended to eliminate language barriers that prevent non-English speakers from having equal access to public services in California. The Act directs every state and local agency that serves a "substantial number" of non-English speakers to provide translators in their languages and to also provide educational materials in those languages. This requires certain materials to be translated into any non-English language spoken by a substantial number of the public served by the agency, defined as 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 five percent or more of the people served by the state agency or any of its local offices or facilities." The languages in which materials and information must be provided to meet the standards of the Act, or similar translation requirements, are often referred to as "threshold languages."

Translation requirements during emergencies. Among other things, the ESA requires counties to develop emergency operations plans and to update the plans to reflect the use of translators and interpreters for purposes of emergency communication. Counties must integrate cultural competency considerations into emergency planning efforts and provide a forum for engaging with culturally diverse communities. As further required by law, Cal OES has established a library of translated emergency notifications that may be used by local authorities in the event of an emergency.

Pursuant to AB 1638 (Fong, Chapter 587, Statutes of 2023), local agencies that provide emergency response services must provide information related to the emergency in English and any non-English language spoken jointly by 5% or more of the population that speaks English less than "very well." Agencies are required

to determine these threshold languages using data from the ACS conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, or an equally reliable source, and to reassess the data every five years.

According to the author, current law has caused confusion among counties as it relates to which languages must be translated. They note that current law could be interpreted to require every single language included in the ACS to be translated, which would force local agencies to direct significant public resources toward translating dozens of languages during a crisis and, more importantly, could crowd out information for those needing it most.

This bill seeks to clarify that local agencies are only required to translate emergency information for a particular language if indicated by data from the ACS, or a similarly reliable source, and further describes how local agencies must calculate the languages that fall into the 5% threshold specified in current law.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: No Local: No

SUPPORT: (Verified 7/7/26)

California State Association of Counties (sponsor)
Urban Counties Caucus

OPPOSITION: (Verified 7/7/26)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: In support of this bill, the sponsor, the California State Association of Counties, writes that, “AB 2341 would....[ensure] that emergency translations are delivered into languages spoken by at least five percent of speakers with translation needs – defined as those that speak English less than “very well.” The bill provides vital clarity for public agencies and ensures the law can meet its intended purpose: to deliver rapid emergency notices in languages most commonly spoken in a city or county.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-0, 5/14/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee,

Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arambula, Bennett, Celeste Rodriguez

Prepared by: Cassie Royce / E.M. /
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