
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1360 (Cervantes) - Elections: translation of election materials

Version: April 14, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

Policy Vote: E. & C.A. 5 - 0

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Robert Ingenito

Bill Summary: SB 1360 would increase language access services and the types of translated election-related materials for voters, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- The Secretary of State (SOS) indicates that it would incur first-year General Fund costs of \$22 million, and \$14.7 million annually thereafter, to implement the provisions of the bill (see Staff Comments).
- Any administrative costs to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) have yet to be identified.
- By increasing the translation duties of local elections officials, this bill creates a state-mandated local program. To the extent the Commission on State Mandates determines that the provisions of this bill create a new program or impose a higher level of service on local agencies, local agencies could claim reimbursement of those costs. The magnitude is unknown, but at a minimum would likely reach the low millions of dollars per election cycle. (General Fund, see Staff Comments).

Background: Current law, the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA), prohibit the denial of a citizen's right to vote on account of the voter's race or color. Additionally, the VRA (including Section 203) requires certain jurisdictions with significant populations of voting age citizens in a language minority community to provide all voting materials in that language. Determinations are based on data from the most recent census.

In December 2021, the United States Census Bureau released its most recent determination of minority language requirements under Section 203 of the VRA. California is required to provide bilingual voting assistance to Spanish speakers in all elections throughout the state, and nine counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara) are required to provide voting materials in at least one language other than English and Spanish.

State law requires SOS, in each gubernatorial election year, to determine the precincts where 3 percent or more of the voting age residents are members of a single language minority group and lack sufficient skills in English to vote without assistance. Counties reportedly saw a major reduction in populations that meet the 3 percent threshold; thus, ballots and other election materials will need to be translated into fewer languages. In

March 2022, SOS essentially reversed course and reinstated the prior precinct minority language determinations. The SOS found sufficient reason to believe it was necessary to reinstate the 2017 and 2020 minority language assistance determinations to ensure communities have access to language assistance services. In December 2025, the SOS issued new language determinations for elections in 2026.

Proposed Law: This bill, among other things, would do the following:

- Require SOS to determine the counties that meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) at least 5,000 voting age citizens who are limited English proficient individuals and are either members of a single language minority group or speak a shared language, (2) at least 5 percent of voting age citizens who are limited English proficient individuals and are either member of a single language minority group or speak a shared language, or (3) for political subdivisions containing any or all parts of an Indian reservation, the number of voting age American Indian or Alaskan Native citizens within the Indian reservation who are limited English proficient individuals is more than 5 percent of all residents of the reservation.
- Require SOS by December 15, 2028 to use the above criteria to publish the list of counties and the languages in which each county is required to provide language access. SOS must subsequently make and publish updated determinations by December 15, 2031, and by December 15 of every fifth year thereafter.
- Require county election officials, beginning January 1, 2027, to use existing language determinations prescribed by Section 203 of the VRA and to translate specified materials and activities.
- Require election officials to provide language assistance for the following election-related materials and services: ballots, voter registration forms and instructions, voter education and outreach materials, voting-related notices, notices of in-language assistance availability, in-person bilingual poll workers and interpreters, live telephonic interpretation services, and websites.
- Provide that whenever SOS or any state agency provides, in any manner, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or services to voters relating to elections, registration, or voting in counties subject to the requirements provided by this bill, SOS or the state agency must also comply with the requirements provided by this bill.
- Require that all materials and services provided by the state or counties in a language other than English must be distributed at the same time as the corresponding English materials.
- Provide a process for interested citizens and entities to provide evidence to the SOS demonstrating a significant need exists for translated election materials for a language not part of the language determinations by the SOS. If a preponderance of evidence is provided, then the SOS must require materials and services to be provided in the requested language.

- Permit the SOS to adopt any rules or regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this bill.

Related Legislation:

- SB 266 (Cervantes, 2025) would have expanded the number of applicable language and the types of election-related materials needing to be translated, including voteable ballots. The bill was held under submission on the Suspense File of this Committee.
- AB 72 (Jackson, 2025) would have required election officials to provide registration notices, forms, instructions, assistance, ballots, and other materials or information relating to the electoral process in Bengali, if requested by a voter. The contents of the bill were removed and now reflect another legislative subject.
- AB 884 (Low, 2024) would have required SOS to make additional language determinations and the translation of additional election-related materials, such as forms and ballots. The bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom.
- AB 1631 (Cervantes, Chapter 552, Statutes of 2022) requires a county elections official to post on their website a list of all polling places where multilingual poll workers will be present and the language or languages in which they will provide assistance. It also requires county election officials to use the internet in their efforts to recruit multilingual poll workers.
- AB 918 (Bonta, Chapter 845, Statutes of 2017) expands the availability and accessibility of facsimile ballots in languages other than English in situations where such facsimile ballots are required to be made available pursuant to existing law.

Staff Comments: As noted previously, SOS indicates that this bill would result in ongoing annual costs of about \$15 million to expand translation requirements to an anticipated 30 additional languages, resulting in increased costs and staffing resources for printing, contracted translation services, website translations, and procurement.

Counties anticipate significant one-time and per-election costs to implement this bill's translation workload. Information provided to the Committee indicates that per-election costs would likely reach the millions of dollars each for counties with larger language diversity, to the hundreds of thousands of dollars for less impacted counties.

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