

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 1360 (Cervantes) – As Amended April 14, 2026

Policy Committee: Elections

Vote: 6 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: Yes

SUMMARY:

This bill expands the circumstances under which the Secretary of State (SOS) and county elections officials must provide translated election materials and language services.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the SOS, on or before December 15, 2028, and annually thereafter in each year ending in “1” or “6,” to identify the counties where at least 5,000 voting age citizens or 5% of voting age citizens are limited English proficient (LEP) and either members of a single language minority group or speak a shared language and publish the list of counties and “covered languages” on the SOS website.
- 2) Requires, beginning January 1, 2027, an elections official in an identified political subdivision to provide certain additional translated election materials, including ballots, voter registration forms, and election notices, as well as a sufficient number of bilingual election workers, to assist voters in a covered language following certain procedures, and also imposes a similar requirement on the SOS or other state agency providing election-related forms, materials, or services to an identified political subdivision.
- 3) Requires, if interested citizens or entities provide the SOS with a preponderance of evidence of a significant need for translation in another language, the SOS to require such translation of materials and services in the applicable political subdivision as a covered language.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Costs of approximately \$22.2 million in the first year and \$14.7 million annually thereafter to the SOS to expand translation requirements to include approximately 30 additional languages (General Fund). Such translation costs include contracted translation services, procurement, website translations, Voter Hotline voicemail updates, printing, and working with vendors to recertify systems (including VoteCal, the statewide voter registration database) with the new language requirements.
- 2) One-time costs in the low millions of dollars to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) for information technology updates to include covered languages when a person registers to vote at the DMV and ongoing costs in the mid-to-high hundreds of thousands of dollars to update covered languages quarterly by voter district and provide quality assurance (General Fund). The California Motor Voter program automatically registers eligible applicants to

vote, unless the applicant chooses to opt-out, and forms currently allow an applicant to select one of 10 languages in which to receive election materials.

- 3) By increasing the translation duties of local elections officials, this bill may create a state-mandated local program. If the Commission on State Mandates determines the provisions of this bill create a new program or impose a higher level of service for which the state must reimburse local costs, counties may seek reimbursement from the state (General Fund). The magnitude of costs depends on language diversity and concentration within each county, with the County of Los Angeles anticipating costs in excess of \$12 million per election, other counties estimating costs in the mid-hundreds of thousands of dollars per election, and some counties estimating no additional costs.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

[B]arring congressional action to reauthorize it, Section 203 is set to expire in 2032. Whatever might happen in Washington, D.C. in the future, lawfully registered voters in California should have a voice in our government, regardless of whether they are fluent in English or have limited English proficiency. [SB] 1360, which is part of the California Voting Rights Act of 2026, will help the more than 3.2 million lawfully registered voters in California who self-identify as [LEP] cast a ballot by making translated election materials more available and accessible. It will accomplish this by codifying Section 203 protections in state law and expanding on Section 203 to provide language access assistance beyond the group of languages required by federal law.

- 2) **Background. *Federal Language Access Voting Rights.*** The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) prohibits the denial of a citizen's right to vote on account of the voter's race or color. The VRA also requires certain jurisdictions with significant populations of voting age citizens in a language minority community to provide all voting materials in that language. Pursuant to Section 203 of the VRA, California, as well as 28 of California's 58 counties, must provide bilingual voting assistance to Spanish speakers. Additionally, nine counties must provide assistance in at least one more language. However, federal law defines language minorities as persons who are Asian, Native American, Alaskan Native, or of Spanish-heritage, and does not cover other language minority groups.

State Language Access Voting Rights. Existing state law requires the SOS, in each gubernatorial election year, to determine the precincts where 3% or more of voting-age residents are members of a single language minority and lack sufficient English-language skills to vote without assistance. Under the SOS's determination, 42 counties must provide assistance in at least one more language that is not Spanish. However, the type of assistance required under state law is more limited than under federal law, which requires translation of *all* election-related materials, including ballots and voter information guides. Under state law, an elections official must provide a certain number of facsimile ballots and related instructions at a polling place and make reasonable efforts to recruit poll workers who are

fluent in threshold languages. Thus, while state law covers more languages in California than federal law, it covers a much smaller volume of election materials.

This bill significantly adds to language translation requirements pursuant to state law by establishing a framework similar to Section 203 of the VRA, applying translation requirements when LEP voting-age U.S. citizens make up at least 5% of a county's voting-age citizen population or exceed 10,000 individuals, which this bill modifies to 5,000 individuals. This bill also significantly expands the types of elections materials that must be translated to more closely mirror federal law – ballots, voter registration forms and instructions, voter education and outreach materials, voting-related notices, notices of in-language accessibility, and website content, as well as in-person bilingual poll workers and interpreters and live telephonic interpretation services. As noted in the Assembly Elections Committee's analysis of this bill, increasing translations would improve voter accessibility, but also create logistical, timeline, and resource challenges, as "The SOS and many counties already rely on a limited pool of translation vendors. Requiring substantially more translations across additional materials and languages may be even more challenging and add more time to an already compressed election calendar."

- 3) **Support and Opposition.** This bill is sponsored by the California Democracy Partnership, which argues, "Voting rights are under active attack at the federal level" and cites "the weaponization of the U.S Department of Justice" and the executive order to make English the official language as examples of ongoing threats that "highlight why California must act now to protect millions of limited-English voters." This bill is also supported by other civil rights groups, voter empowerment groups, and labor organizations.

This bill is opposed by the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials, unless amended "to ensure that counties provide high quality and accurate translated materials and oral assistance to voters with language needs."

- 4) **Related Legislation.** SB 266 (Cervantes) also requires translation of additional elections-related materials in more languages, following different standards than this bill. SB 266 was held on the Senate Appropriations Committee's suspense file.
- 5) **Prior Legislation.** AB 884 (Low), of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, would have also required translation of additional elections-related materials in more languages, following different standards than this bill and SB 266. Governor Newsom vetoed AB 884, stating, "While I support the author's goal of expanding language access and resources in our elections, this bill would create new, ongoing general fund cost pressures in the tens of millions of dollars not included in the 2024 Budget Act."

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