
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 1360
Author: Cervantes (D), et al.
Amended: 8/20/26
Vote: 21

SENATE ELECTIONS & C.A. COMMITTEE: 5-0, 4/21/26
AYES: Wiener, Choi, Allen, Cervantes, Umberg

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-0, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NO VOTE RECORDED: Seyarto, Dahle

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-1, 5/14/26
AYES: Cervantes, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NOES: Seyarto
NO VOTE RECORDED: Dahle

SENATE FLOOR: 28-0, 5/22/26
AYES: Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Ochoa Bogh, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Becker, Dahle, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Niello, Padilla, Seyarto, Stern, Strickland

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: Passed, 8/30/26

SUBJECT: Elections: translation of election materials

SOURCE: The California Democracy Partnership

DIGEST: This bill increases language access services and the types of translated election-related materials for voters

Assembly Amendments added coauthors, made various changes to required language services, and addressed chaptering issues with SB 715 (Allen) of 2026.

ANALYSIS:

Existing federal law, pursuant to Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA):

- 1) Requires a state or a political subdivision of a state to provide voting materials in the language of a minority group when that group within the jurisdiction has an illiteracy rate higher than the national illiteracy rate, and the number of United States citizens of voting age in that single language group within the jurisdiction either:
 - a) Numbers more than 10,000;
 - b) Makes up more than 5% of all voting age citizens; or
 - c) On an Indian reservation, exceeds 5% of all reservation residents.
- 2) Defines language minorities or language minority groups, for the purposes of the above provisions, to mean people who are American Indian, Asian American, Alaska Native, or of Spanish heritage.

Existing state law:

- 1) Declares the intent of the Legislature that non-English-speaking citizens be encouraged to vote and appropriate efforts should be made to minimize obstacles to voting by citizens who lack sufficient skills in English to vote without assistance.
- 2) Requires election officials to make reasonable efforts to recruit poll workers who are fluent in a language used by at least 3% of citizens of the voting-age residents of a precinct and in English.
- 3) Requires two facsimile ballots and related instructions to be available at a polling place in Spanish or other languages for which the Secretary of State (SOS) has determined at least 3% of the voting age residents in a county or precinct are members of a single language minority and lack sufficient skills in English to vote without assistance. Four facsimile ballots and related instructions must be available at a polling place in Spanish or other languages in which the SOS has determined more than 20% of voting age residents in a

county or precinct are members of a single language minority and lack sufficient skills in English to vote without assistance.

- 4) Requires a county that conducts elections using vote centers pursuant to the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA) to provide language assistance, translated election materials, and information regarding the availability of language assistance in all languages required in the jurisdiction.
- 5) Requires VCA counties to establish language accessibility advisory committees (LAAC).
- 6) Provides a county elections official is not required to provide facsimile copies of the ballot in a particular language if they are required to provide translated ballots in that language pursuant to federal law.
- 7) Requires the SOS to establish a statewide LAAC to help it implement federal and state laws relating to access to the electoral process by limited English proficiency voters.

This bill:

- 1) Requires the SOS, on or before December 15, 2031, and on or before December 15 of each year ending in 1 or 7, to determine which counties meet one or more of the following criteria below, and to publish a list of the counties and the languages determined for each county on the SOS' website:
 - a) 10,000 or more citizens of voting age in a county are limited English proficient (LEP) individuals and are either members of a single language minority group or speak a shared language.
 - b) 5% or more of the citizens of voting age in a county are LEP individuals and are either members of a single language minority group or speak a shared language.
 - c) In the case of a political subdivision that contains all or any part of an Indian reservation, the number of voting-age American Indian or Alaska Native citizens within the Indian reservation who are LEP individuals is more than 5% of all residents of the reservation.
- 2) Requires the SOS, if interested citizens or entities provide a preponderance of evidence that a language group in a county meets any of the criteria in 1) of this bill, notwithstanding the fact that the SOS did not identify that language as

applying to that county, to include that language among those listed for the county.

- 3) Requires an elections official to provide translated election materials, including ballots, sample ballots, voter registration forms, voter education and outreach publications, election notices and signage, and a sufficient number of bilingual election workers at each election for each language identified by the SOS pursuant to 1) or 2) of this bill. The SOS or any state agency must provide election-related forms, materials, or services to an identified political subdivision to translate those materials into those languages.
- 4) Requires an elections official, from January 1, 2027, until the SOS makes the determinations pursuant to 1) of this bill, to provide translated election materials in languages pursuant to existing determinations made under Section 203 of the federal VRA, and in any language identified pursuant to 2) of this bill.
- 5) Requires an elections official, for newly covered languages in a county, to begin providing assistance in a language no later than 180 days after the date that a language is determined to be a covered language. A county must begin providing translated ballots no later than 18 months from the date the determination was made, if compliance to provide a translated ballot requires certification or recertification of a county's voting system or related election technology.
- 6) Requires an elections official, beginning January 1, 2027, to provide facsimile copies of the ballot and related instructions in a language for a precinct when the SOS determines that 3% or more of the voting-age residents in a single language minority group lack sufficient English proficiency to vote without assistance in more than two precincts within the county, instead of in any precinct in the county
- 7) Permits the SOS to adopt any rules or regulations necessary to implement this bill.
- 8) Includes legislative findings and declarations, and addresses chaptering issues between this bill and SB 715 (Allen) of 2026.

Background

Census Data. On December 8, 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 the SOS, in each gubernatorial election year, to determine the precincts where 3% 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. According to a memo from the SOS of December 31, 2021, the office contracted with the California Statewide Database at the University of California, Berkeley to determine which precincts have reached the 3% threshold for single language minorities.

Due to stricter census privacy disclosure rules, counties saw a major reduction in populations that met the 3% threshold, meaning ballots and other election materials needed to be translated into fewer languages. The memo encouraged counties to work with community groups to determine if a need exists for any of the previously covered languages before eliminating the use of materials in languages.

On March 1, 2022, the 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.

California Voting for All Act & Previous Legislation. In 2017, in an effort to reduce barriers and improve language access and assistance for voters who identify as LEP voters, the Legislature approved, and Governor Brown signed AB 918 (Bonta, Chapter 845, Statutes of 2017). AB 918 expanded 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.

AB 884 (Low) of 2024 would have required the SOS to make additional language determinations and would have required the translation of additional election-related materials, such as forms and ballots. Governor Newsom vetoed AB 884 for fiscal reasons.

SB 266 (Cervantes) of 2025 would have provided a similar framework as AB 884 by expanding the number of applicable languages and the types of election-related materials needing to be translated. Depending on the language, this could have

been various voter-related forms or instructions and voteable ballots. The bill was held in the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

Comments

Author's Statement. Section 203 of the federal VRA guarantees language access assistance to lawfully registered voters in the United States who speak Spanish, an Asian language, or a native language if the population in a jurisdiction exceeds certain thresholds. However, barring 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. This bill will help the more than 3.2 million lawfully registered voters in California who self-identify as limited-English proficient 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.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 266 (Cervantes) of 2025 would have expanded the number of applicable languages and the types of election-related materials needing to be translated, including voteable ballots. The bill was held in the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

AB 72 (Jackson) of 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 was removed and now reflects another legislative subject.

AB 884 (Low) of 2024 would have required the SOS to make additional language determinations and the translation of additional election-related materials, such as forms and ballots. AB 884 was vetoed by Governor Newsom for fiscal reasons.

AB 1631 (Cervantes, Chapter 552, Statutes of 2022) required 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 required county election officials to use the internet in their efforts to recruit multilingual poll workers.

AB 918 (Bonta, Chapter 845, Statutes of 2017) expanded the availability and accessibility of facsimile ballots in languages other than English.

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

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

- 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 hundreds of thousands of dollars per election, and some counties estimating no additional costs.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/30/26)

The California Democracy Partnership (source)

AAPIs for Civic Empowerment

ACLU California Action

Asian Law Caucus

California Black Power Network

California Common Cause

California Environmental Voters

California Native Vote Project
Catalyst California
CHIRLA
Inland Empire United
League of Women Voters of California
Legal Defense Fund
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans
Power California
SEIU California
UCLA Voting Rights Project
American Association of University of Women of California
Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California
Asian Law Alliance
Black Leadership Council
California Clean Money Campaign
California Domestic Workers Coalition
California School Employees Association, AFL-CIO
CFT – A Union of Educators and Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO
Courage California
Disability Rights California
Dēmos
Dolores Huerta Foundation
FairVote Action
Hmong Innovating Politics
NextGen California
Public Citizen's Democracy Campaign
Starting Over Inc.
Starting Over Strong
UDW/AFSCME Local 3930
Viet Rainbow of Orange County
VietRISE
Western Center on Law and Poverty

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/30/26)

None received

Prepared by: Scott Matsumoto / E. & C.A. / (916) 651-4106

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**** **END** ****