

## Language Assistance for Limited-English-Proficient Voters

### Talking Points

**Background:** Congress passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965 to ensure that all eligible voters were protected from discrimination as they cast their ballots. For years prior to this, many states had laws on their books that prevented minority citizens from voting. Some of these laws required people to take a reading test or interpret a passage out of the Constitution in order to vote, or required people registering to vote to bring someone already registered who would vouch for their "good character." The Voting Rights Act made these and other discriminatory practices illegal, and gave private citizens the right to sue in federal court to stop them. Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, amended in 1975, mandated that some jurisdictions provide bilingual voting assistance for language minority voters; these language assistance provisions were extended in 1992. Congress recognized there was a strong link between voters who were limited-English-proficient and low voter participation. Bilingual voting assistance breaks down the language barriers that prevent certain citizens from exercising their Constitutional right to vote.

**Which jurisdictions can offer bilingual assistance?** Section 203 requires that localities that are more than 10,000 or 5% of the total voting-age citizens in a single political subdivision (these are usually counties, but townships or municipalities in some states may also be covered) who do not speak English well, and who have an illiteracy rate higher than the national average (a fifth grade education level or less) be covered. The Director of the Bureau of the Census determines which jurisdictions are covered under this section and updates them every ten years to coincide with the decennial Census. The determination made by the Director is final and cannot be challenged in a court of law.

**What languages are covered under Section 203?** There are four language minority groups covered under Section 203: Spanish, Asian, Native American, and Alaskan Native. These groups are covered because historically they have suffered from discrimination that has excluded them from the political process.

**Does Section 203 cover my jurisdiction?** The Census Bureau released the newly-covered jurisdictions on July 26, 2002. According to the new determinations there are more than 220 jurisdictions that need to provide language assistance in Spanish, and about 115 that will have to provide assistance to Asian Americans, Alaskan Natives, or Native Americans. There was an increase of 49 newly-covered jurisdictions for Spanish language voters. To find out if your jurisdiction is covered go to [www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting).

**What information or materials need to be translated into the languages covered?** The purpose of Section 203 is to provide non-English-speaking citizens with the same information and opportunities to participate in the electoral process as the general electorate. Thus, all information that is provided in English must also be provided in the languages designated by the Census Bureau. A covered jurisdiction may be required to provide the following types of assistance.

- ▶ Translation of written materials, such as regular and absentee ballots, sample ballots, affidavit ballots, voter registration forms, polling place notices, petitions and informational materials concerning the opportunity to register, the deadline for voter registration, upcoming elections, and absentee voting.
- ▶ Oral assistance at the polling sites. A sufficient number of trained interpreters should be available, based on the number of registered voters who need such assistance. Additionally, voters have the right to seek assistance by a person of his/her choice.

- ▶ Publicity regarding the availability of bilingual assistance. Examples include: bilingual notices at voter registration and polling sites; announcements in language-minority radio, television, and newspapers; and direct contact with language-minority community-based organizations.

**Tips to answer questions related to language assistance. It is very important to have a clear and uniform message.**

*Q: Why should jurisdictions provide language assistance to voters who can't speak English?*

The implementation of the language assistance provisions contained in Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act are important because:

- ▶ Voters who don't speak English well want to participate and make a difference; it is an American value to be involved in the democratic process.
- ▶ Civic participation will increase if language-minority voters are given a fair chance to participate in the electoral process.
- ▶ No one should be denied the right to vote! Voters with limited English proficiency are entitled to exercise this basic constitutional right. Language assistance should not be denied to a person who doesn't speak English well or who may need help understanding the information contained in a ballot.
- ▶ Newly-naturalized citizens are eager to contribute to the country to which they just pledged their loyalty, but in many cases their English language capability is not sufficient yet to fully understand intricate ballots. For instance, they may need assistance understanding a ballot proposition or a bond issue. These ballots are not straightforward! America needs voters to understand the issues and make informed decisions.
- ▶ There are many Latinos serving in the armed forces, and while they may be fluent in English their parents may not be. The family members of those who have contributed to the protection of this country should not be denied the right to vote because they don't speak English well.

**How can I help?** If your jurisdiction is covered you can:

- ▶ Talk to your friends and family and ask them to volunteer as bilingual poll workers.
- ▶ By knowing your rights you can ensure that other voters who do not speak English well receive language assistance at the polls.
- ▶ Apply the tips above to craft clear messages about this issue.

**Areas Requiring**

**Bilingual Election Material**

**Under the Voting Rights Act of 1965,**

**As Designated by the Director of the**

**Bureau of the Census**

**2000**

COVERED AREAS FOR VOTING RIGHTS BILINGUAL ELECTION MATERIALS—2000

State and political subdivision	Group
<b>Alaska:</b>	
Aleutians West Census Area .....	Aleut.
Bethel Census Area .....	Eskimo.
Bethel Census Area .....	American Indian (Tribe not specified).
Bethel Census Area .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Denali Borough .....	Athabascan.
Dillingham Census Area .....	Eskimo.
Dillingham Census Area .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Dillingham Census Area .....	Native (Other Group specified).
Kenai Peninsula Borough .....	American Indian (Tribe not specified).
Kenai Peninsula Borough .....	Aleut.
Kodiak Island Borough .....	Filipino.
Lake and Peninsula Borough .....	Athabascan.
Lake and Peninsula Borough .....	Aleut.
Lake and Peninsula Borough .....	Eskimo.
Nome Census Area .....	Eskimo.
North Slope Borough .....	American Indian (Tribe not specified).
North Slope Borough .....	Eskimo.
Northwest Arctic Borough .....	Eskimo.
Northwest Arctic Borough .....	Alaska Native (Other Group specified).
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area .....	Athabascan.
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area .....	Native (Other Group specified).
Valdez-Cordova Census Area .....	Athabascan.
Wade Hampton Census Area .....	Eskimo.
Wade Hampton Census Area .....	American Indian (Chickasaw).
Wade Hampton Census Area .....	American Indian (Tribe not specified).
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area .....	Athabascan.
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area .....	Eskimo.
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
<b>Arizona:</b>	
Apache County .....	American Indian (Apache).
Apache County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Apache County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Cochise County .....	Hispanic.
Coconino County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Coconino County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Gila County .....	American Indian (Apache).
Graham County .....	American Indian (Apache).
Greenlee County .....	Hispanic.
Maricopa County .....	Hispanic.
Maricopa County .....	American Indian (Tohono O'Odham).
Navajo County .....	American Indian (Apache).
Navajo County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Navajo County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Pima County .....	Hispanic.
Pima County .....	American Indian (Tohono O'Odham).
Pima County .....	American Indian (Yaqui).
Pinal County .....	American Indian (Apache).
Pinal County .....	American Indian (Tohono O'Odham).
Santa Cruz County .....	Hispanic.
Yuma County .....	Hispanic.
Yuma County .....	American Indian (Yuman).
<b>California:</b>	
State Coverage .....	Hispanic.
Alameda County .....	Hispanic.
Alameda County .....	Chinese.
Colusa County .....	Hispanic.
Contra Costa County .....	Hispanic.
Fresno County .....	Hispanic.

## COVERED AREAS FOR VOTING RIGHTS BILINGUAL ELECTION MATERIALS—2000—Continued

State and political subdivision	Group
Imperial County .....	Hispanic.
Imperial County .....	American Indian (Central or South American).
Imperial County .....	American Indian (Yuman).
Kern County .....	Hispanic.
Kings County .....	Hispanic.
Los Angeles County .....	Hispanic.
Los Angeles County .....	Chinese.
Los Angeles County .....	Filipino.
Los Angeles County .....	Japanese.
Los Angeles County .....	Korean.
Los Angeles County .....	Vietnamese.
Madera County .....	Hispanic.
Merced County .....	Hispanic.
Monterey County .....	Hispanic.
Orange County .....	Hispanic.
Orange County .....	Chinese.
Orange County .....	Korean.
Orange County .....	Vietnamese.
Riverside County .....	Hispanic.
Riverside County .....	American Indian (Central or South American).
Sacramento County .....	Hispanic.
San Benito County .....	Hispanic.
San Bernardino County .....	Hispanic.
San Diego County .....	Hispanic.
San Diego County .....	Filipino.
San Francisco County .....	Hispanic.
San Francisco County .....	Chinese.
San Joaquin County .....	Hispanic.
San Mateo County .....	Hispanic.
San Mateo County .....	Chinese.
Santa Barbara County .....	Hispanic.
Santa Clara County .....	Hispanic.
Santa Clara County .....	Chinese.
Santa Clara County .....	Filipino.
Santa Clara County .....	Vietnamese.
Stanislaus County .....	Hispanic.
Tulare County .....	Hispanic.
Ventura County .....	Hispanic.
Colorado:	
Alamosa County .....	Hispanic.
Conejos County .....	Hispanic.
Costilla County .....	Hispanic.
Crowley County .....	Hispanic.
Denver County .....	Hispanic.
La Plata County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
La Plata County .....	American Indian (Ute).
Montezuma County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Montezuma County .....	American Indian (Ute).
Otero County .....	Hispanic.
Rio Grande County .....	Hispanic.
Saguache County .....	Hispanic.
Connecticut:	
Bridgeport town (Fairfield County) .....	Hispanic.
Hartford town (Hartford County) .....	Hispanic.
Meriden town (New Haven County) .....	Hispanic.
New Britain town (Hartford County) .....	Hispanic.
New Haven town (New Haven County) .....	Hispanic.
Waterbury town (New Haven County) .....	Hispanic.
Windham town (Windham County) .....	Hispanic.
Florida:	
Broward County .....	Hispanic.
Broward County .....	American Indian (Seminole).
Collier County .....	American Indian (Seminole).
Glades County .....	American Indian (Seminole).
Hardee County .....	Hispanic.
Hendry County .....	Hispanic.
Hillsborough County .....	Hispanic.
Miami-Dade County .....	Hispanic.
Orange County .....	Hispanic.
Osceola County .....	Hispanic.
Palm Beach County .....	Hispanic.
Hawaii:	
Honolulu County .....	Chinese.

COVERED AREAS FOR VOTING RIGHTS BILINGUAL ELECTION MATERIALS—2000—Continued

State and political subdivision	Group
Honolulu County .....	Filipino.
Honolulu County .....	Japanese.
Maui County .....	Filipino.
Idaho:	
Bannock County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Bingham County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Caribou County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Owyhee County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Power County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Illinois:	
Cook County .....	Hispanic.
Cook County .....	Chinese.
Kane County .....	Hispanic.
Kansas:	
Finney County .....	Hispanic.
Ford County .....	Hispanic.
Grant County .....	Hispanic.
Haskell County .....	Hispanic.
Kearny County .....	Hispanic.
Seward County .....	Hispanic.
Louisiana: Allen Parish .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Maryland: Montgomery County .....	Hispanic.
Massachusetts:	
Boston city (Suffolk County) .....	Hispanic.
Chelsea city (Suffolk County) .....	Hispanic.
Holyoke city (Hampden County) .....	Hispanic.
Lawrence city (Essex County) .....	Hispanic.
Southbridge town (Worcester County) .....	Hispanic.
Springfield city (Hampden County) .....	Hispanic.
Michigan: Clyde township (Allegan County) .....	Hispanic.
Mississippi:	
Attala County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Jackson County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Jones County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Kemper County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Leake County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Neshoba County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Newton County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Scott County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Winston County .....	American Indian (Choctaw).
Montana:	
Big Horn County .....	American Indian (Cheyenne).
Rosebud County .....	American Indian (Cheyenne).
Nebraska:	
Colfax County .....	Hispanic.
Sheridan County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Nevada:	
Clark County .....	Hispanic.
Elko County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Elko County .....	American Indian (Shoshone).
Humboldt County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Lyon County .....	American Indian (Paiute).
Nye County .....	American Indian (Shoshone).
White Pine County .....	American Indian (Shoshone).
New Jersey:	
Bergen County .....	Hispanic.
Cumberland County .....	Hispanic.
Essex County .....	Hispanic.
Hudson County .....	Hispanic.
Middlesex County .....	Hispanic.
Passaic County .....	Hispanic.
Union County .....	Hispanic.
New Mexico:	
State Coverage .....	Hispanic.
Bernalillo County .....	Hispanic.
Bernalillo County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Bernalillo County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Catron County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Chaves County .....	Hispanic.
Cibola County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Cibola County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
De Baca County .....	Hispanic.

## COVERED AREAS FOR VOTING RIGHTS BILINGUAL ELECTION MATERIALS—2000—Continued

State and political subdivision	Group
Dona Ana County .....	Hispanic.
Eddy County .....	Hispanic.
Grant County .....	Hispanic.
Guadalupe County .....	Hispanic.
Harding County .....	Hispanic.
Hidalgo County .....	Hispanic.
Lea County .....	Hispanic.
Luna County .....	Hispanic.
McKinley County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
McKinley County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Mora County .....	Hispanic.
Rio Arriba County .....	Hispanic.
Rio Arriba County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Roosevelt County .....	Hispanic.
San Juan County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
San Juan County .....	American Indian (Ute).
San Miguel County .....	Hispanic.
Sandoval County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Sandoval County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Santa Fe County .....	Hispanic.
Santa Fe County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Socorro County .....	Hispanic.
Socorro County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
Socorro County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Taos County .....	Hispanic.
Taos County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Torrance County .....	Hispanic.
Union County .....	Hispanic.
Valencia County .....	Hispanic.
Valencia County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
New York:	
Bronx County .....	Hispanic.
Kings County .....	Hispanic.
Kings County .....	Chinese.
Nassau County .....	Hispanic.
New York County .....	Hispanic.
New York County .....	Chinese.
Queens County .....	Hispanic.
Queens County .....	Chinese.
Queens County .....	Korean.
Suffolk County .....	Hispanic.
Westchester County .....	Hispanic.
North Dakota:	
Richland County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Sargent County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Oklahoma:	
Harmon County .....	Hispanic.
Texas County .....	Hispanic.
Oregon: Malheur County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
Pennsylvania: Philadelphia County .....	Hispanic.
Rhode Island:	
Central Falls city (Providence County) .....	Hispanic.
Providence city (Providence County) .....	Hispanic.
South Dakota:	
Bennett County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Codington County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Day County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Dewey County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Grant County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Gregory County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Haakon County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Jackson County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Lyman County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Marshall County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Meade County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Meade County .....	American Indian (Cheyenne).
Mellette County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Roberts County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Shannon County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Stanley County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Todd County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Tripp County .....	American Indian (Sioux).

COVERED AREAS FOR VOTING RIGHTS BILINGUAL ELECTION MATERIALS—2000—Continued

State and political subdivision	Group
Ziebach County .....	American Indian (Sioux).
Texas:	
State Coverage .....	Hispanic.
Andrews County .....	Hispanic.
Atascosa County .....	Hispanic.
Bailey County .....	Hispanic.
Bee County .....	Hispanic.
Bexar County .....	Hispanic.
Borden County .....	Hispanic.
Brewster County .....	Hispanic.
Brooks County .....	Hispanic.
Caldwell County .....	Hispanic.
Calhoun County .....	Hispanic.
Cameron County .....	Hispanic.
Castro County .....	Hispanic.
Cochran County .....	Hispanic.
Concho County .....	Hispanic.
Crane County .....	Hispanic.
Crockett County .....	Hispanic.
Crosby County .....	Hispanic.
Culberson County .....	Hispanic.
Dallas County .....	Hispanic.
Dawson County .....	Hispanic.
Deaf Smith County .....	Hispanic.
DeWitt County .....	Hispanic.
Dimmit County .....	Hispanic.
Duval County .....	Hispanic.
Ector County .....	Hispanic.
Edwards County .....	Hispanic.
El Paso County .....	Hispanic.
El Paso County .....	American Indian (Pueblo).
Fisher County .....	Hispanic.
Floyd County .....	Hispanic.
Frio County .....	Hispanic.
Gaines County .....	Hispanic.
Garza County .....	Hispanic.
Glasscock County .....	Hispanic.
Goliad County .....	Hispanic.
Gonzales County .....	Hispanic.
Guadalupe County .....	Hispanic.
Hale County .....	Hispanic.
Hall County .....	Hispanic.
Hansford County .....	Hispanic.
Harris County .....	Hispanic.
Harris County .....	Vietnamese.
Hidalgo County .....	Hispanic.
Hockley County .....	Hispanic.
Howard County .....	Hispanic.
Hudspeth County .....	Hispanic.
Irion County .....	Hispanic.
Jeff Davis County .....	Hispanic.
Jim Hogg County .....	Hispanic.
Jim Wells County .....	Hispanic.
Karnes County .....	Hispanic.
Kenedy County .....	Hispanic.
Kinney County .....	Hispanic.
Kleberg County .....	Hispanic.
Knox County .....	Hispanic.
Lamb County .....	Hispanic.
La Salle County .....	Hispanic.
Live Oak County .....	Hispanic.
Loving County .....	Hispanic.
Lubbock County .....	Hispanic.
Lynn County .....	Hispanic.
Madison County .....	Hispanic.
Martin County .....	Hispanic.
Matagorda County .....	Hispanic.
Maverick County .....	Hispanic.
Maverick County .....	American Indian (Other Tribe specified).
McMullen County .....	Hispanic.
Medina County .....	Hispanic.
Menard County .....	Hispanic.



## COVERED AREAS FOR VOTING RIGHTS BILINGUAL ELECTION MATERIALS—2000—Continued

State and political subdivision	Group
Midland County .....	Hispanic.
Mitchell County .....	Hispanic.
Moore County .....	Hispanic.
Nolan County .....	Hispanic.
Nueces County .....	Hispanic.
Parker County .....	Hispanic.
Pecos County .....	Hispanic.
Presidio County .....	Hispanic.
Reagan County .....	Hispanic.
Reeves County .....	Hispanic.
Refugio County .....	Hispanic.
Runnels County .....	Hispanic.
San Patricio County .....	Hispanic.
Schleicher County .....	Hispanic.
Scurry County .....	Hispanic.
Starr County .....	Hispanic.
Sterling County .....	Hispanic.
Sutton County .....	Hispanic.
Swisher County .....	Hispanic.
Tarrant County .....	Hispanic.
Terrell County .....	Hispanic.
Terry County .....	Hispanic.
Titus County .....	Hispanic.
Tom Green County .....	Hispanic.
Travis County .....	Hispanic.
Upton County .....	Hispanic.
Uvalde County .....	Hispanic.
Val Verde County .....	Hispanic.
Victoria County .....	Hispanic.
Ward County .....	Hispanic.
Webb County .....	Hispanic.
Wharton County .....	Hispanic.
Willacy County .....	Hispanic.
Wilson County .....	Hispanic.
Winkler County .....	Hispanic.
Yoakum County .....	Hispanic.
Zapata County .....	Hispanic.
Zavala County .....	Hispanic.
Utah:	
San Juan County .....	American Indian (Navajo).
San Juan County .....	American Indian (Ute).
Washington:	
Adams County .....	Hispanic.
Franklin County .....	Hispanic.
King County .....	Chinese.
Yakima County .....	Hispanic.