
HOUSE BILL 1381

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Representatives Shavers, Santos, Pollet, Springer, Wylie, and Ramel

Read first time 01/17/25. Referred to Committee on State Government & Tribal Relations.

1 AN ACT Relating to improving meaningful access to elections by
2 increasing language assistance; adding new sections to chapter 29A.04
3 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** A new section is added to chapter 29A.04
6 RCW to read as follows:

7 (1) The county auditor of a covered county described under
8 subsection (2) of this section shall provide registration or voting
9 notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or
10 information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, in
11 the language of covered language minority groups in that county as
12 designated by the secretary of state under subsection (3) of this
13 section, as well as in English.

14 (2) A county is a covered county for purposes of this section if
15 the secretary of state determines, based on census data as described
16 under subsection (3) of this section that:

17 (a) At least two and one-half percent of citizens residing in a
18 county who are of voting age or qualified to register to vote are
19 members of a single language minority group and have limited English
20 proficiency, and the illiteracy rate of the limited English

1 proficient citizens who speak the same language exceed the national
2 illiteracy rate; or

3 (b) The county contains all or any part of an Indian reservation
4 and at least two and one-half percent of the American Indian or
5 Alaska Native citizens residing within the Indian reservation who are
6 of voting age or qualified to register to vote are members of a
7 single language minority group and have limited English proficiency,
8 and the illiteracy rate of the limited English proficient citizens
9 who speak the same language exceed the national illiteracy rate.

10 (3) (a) The secretary of state shall designate the covered
11 language minority groups under subsection (2) of this section for
12 each covered county no later than August 1, 2025, and every five
13 years thereafter, based on the most current population estimates
14 derived from the American community survey along with relevant
15 decennial census data.

16 (b) The secretary of state shall directly notify each covered
17 county of the language designations and publish such designations in
18 the Washington State Register within 30 days following the release of
19 census data from the American community survey or decennial census.

20 (c) The secretary's designations are effective upon publication
21 in the Washington State Register, but counties have 365 days,
22 including weekends and holidays, from the publication date to reach
23 full compliance.

24 (4) The requirements under this section are in addition to, and
25 do not supersede or otherwise impact, the requirements under RCW
26 29A.92.050.

27 (5) Once a county is designated as a covered county, the language
28 designations for that county remain in effect unless terminated by
29 the secretary of state. A county auditor may, no earlier than five
30 years after a language minority group designation is made for that
31 county by the secretary of state, petition the secretary to terminate
32 the designation, and the secretary may grant the petition, if the
33 county auditor proves using census data that the membership of the
34 applicable language minority group falls below the thresholds
35 described in subsection (2) (a) and (b) of this section and the
36 illiteracy rate of that group is equal to or less than the national
37 illiteracy rate.

38 (6) The secretary of state shall establish a grant program to
39 provide funding to counties to implement this section and section 2
40 of this act.

1 (7) For purposes of this section:

2 (a) "Illiteracy" means the failure to complete the fifth primary
3 grade.

4 (b) "Indian reservation" means all lands, notwithstanding the
5 issuance of any patent, within the boundaries of areas set aside by
6 the United States for the use and occupancy of Indian tribes by
7 treaty, law, or executive order, or otherwise designated or described
8 "reservation" by any federal act, and that are currently recognized
9 as "Indian reservations" by the United States department of the
10 interior. The term applies to all land within the boundaries of the
11 Indian reservation, regardless of whether the land is owned by
12 nonmembers, tribal members, or an Indian tribe.

13 (c) "Limited English proficiency" means that the person is unable
14 to speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in
15 the electoral process.

16 (d) "Single language minority group" means persons who are
17 American Indian, Asian American, Alaskan Native, or of Spanish
18 heritage.

19 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 29A.04
20 RCW to read as follows:

21 (1) The county auditor of a covered county described under
22 subsection (2) of this section shall provide registration or voting
23 notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or
24 information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, in
25 the language of covered language minority groups in that county as
26 designated by the secretary of state under subsection (3) of this
27 section, as well as in English.

28 (2) A county is a covered county for purposes of this section if
29 the secretary of state determines:

30 (a) Based on census data as described under subsection (3) of
31 this section that:

32 (i) At least one and one-half percent of citizens residing in a
33 county who are of voting age or qualified to register to vote are
34 members of a single language minority group and have limited English
35 proficiency, and the illiteracy rate of the limited English
36 proficient citizens who speak the same language exceed the national
37 illiteracy rate; or

38 (ii) The county contains all or any part of an Indian reservation
39 and at least one and one-half percent of the American Indian or

1 Alaska Native citizens residing within the Indian reservation who are
2 of voting age or qualified to register to vote are members of a
3 single language minority group and have limited English proficiency,
4 and the illiteracy rate of the limited English proficient citizens
5 who speak the same language exceed the national illiteracy rate; and

6 (b) Based on population estimates published by the office of
7 financial management, the county has a population between 125,000 and
8 225,000 people.

9 (3) (a) The secretary of state shall designate the covered
10 language minority groups under subsection (2) of this section for
11 each covered county no later than August 1, 2025, based on the most
12 current population estimates derived from the American community
13 survey along with relevant decennial census data.

14 (b) The secretary of state shall directly notify each covered
15 county of the language designations and publish such designations in
16 the Washington State Register within 30 days following the release of
17 census data from the American community survey or decennial census.

18 (c) The secretary's designations are effective upon publication
19 in the Washington State Register, but counties have 365 days,
20 including weekends and holidays, from the publication date to reach
21 full compliance.

22 (4) The requirements under this section are in addition to, and
23 do not supersede or otherwise impact, the requirements under RCW
24 29A.92.050.

25 (5) The grant program created under section 1 of this act is
26 established to provide funding to counties to implement this section.

27 (6) By December 1, 2031, and in compliance with RCW 43.01.036,
28 the office of the secretary of state shall submit a report to the
29 appropriate committees of the legislature and the governor that
30 details the impact to counties and voters from the implementation of
31 this section.

32 (7) The definitions in section 1(7) of this act apply to this
33 section.

34 (8) This section expires December 31, 2031.

35 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** If specific funding for the purposes of
36 this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not

1 provided by June 30, 2025, in the omnibus appropriations act, this
2 act is null and void.

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