Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act
Covered Areas for Voting Rights Bilingual Election Materials

The Language Minority Provisions of the Voting Rights Act

Congress enacted the language minority provisions because it found that:

Through the use of various practices and procedures, citizens of language minorities have been effectively excluded from participation in the electoral process. Among other factors, the denial of the right to vote to such minority group citizens is ordinarily directly related to the unequal educational opportunities afforded them resulting in high illiteracy and low voting participation. The Congress declares that, in order to enforce the guarantees of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution, it is necessary to eliminate such discrimination by prohibiting these practices, and by prescribing other remedial devices.

Legal Requirements

The language minority provisions of the Voting Rights Act require that when a covered state or political subdivision provides registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, it shall provide them in the language of the applicable minority group as well as in the English language.

The requirements of the law are straightforward: all election information that is available in English must also be available in the minority language so that all citizens will have an effective opportunity to register, learn the details of the elections, and cast a free and effective ballot.

Covered Jurisdictions

Covered jurisdictions are determined by the Census Bureau based upon a formula set out in the Voting Rights Act. The most recent determinations for Section 203 were made on December 5, 2016.

Covered language minorities are limited to American Indians, Asian Americans, Alaska Natives, and Spanish-heritage citizens - the groups that Congress found to have faced barriers in the political process.