



How Language Access Protects Maryland Voters

SB 685/HB 983 protects your rights as a Maryland voter.

How does SB 685/HB 983 protect voters whose first language is not English?

SB 685/HB 983 requires election-related language assistance in the parts of Maryland where it is not already required by federal law, providing more access for limited English proficient (LEP) voters.

It also requires voting materials translated into covered languages to be “of an equal quality” to the corresponding English language materials.

Why do we need this provision?

While we have worked hard to pass reforms that have made our elections more accessible, Maryland voters only benefit if the options for voting and the overall process are in a language they can understand.

- Maryland is the most diverse state on the east coast, made up of a large number of LEP voters.
- LEP voters deserve the right to vote effectively in the language they understand.

Where and when is language assistance required?

- SB 685 / HB 983 requires a county, city, or town to provide assistance in a particular language when LEP individuals who speak that language make up at least 2% of the population (and number at least 100 people) or have a total population of at least 4,000.
- The State Board of Elections will determine which places meet this requirement every two years based on Census data.
- Under current demographic data, SB 685/HB 983 is projected to expand language assistance in certain localities to include Spanish, French, Korean, Amharic, and Chinese (including Taiwanese).

What protections are required for LEP voters?

- Accurate translations of election and voting-related materials, including:
 - Voter registration notices and forms
 - Sample ballots
 - Election instructions
 - All other materials related to the voting process
- Oral assistance at polling locations where feasible.

Does SB 685/ HB 983 provide more language assistance protection than the federal Voting Rights Act?

Yes!

- The proposed population thresholds are lower than the federal VRA, so it will expand language assistance to more places. This will guarantee assistance to more LEP voters throughout the state and not just in large urban centers.
- SB 685 / HB 983 also requires assistance in more languages, such as Amharic.