



House Bill 983

Election Law - Local Boards of Elections - Language-Related Assistance

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Ways and Means Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 18, 2025

From: Kevin Kinnally

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 983 **WITH AMENDMENTS** to enhance language access in elections while ensuring local governments have the necessary resources to meet these new requirements.

Counties support equitable access to voting and recognize the importance of language assistance in elections. However, HB 983 creates a significant unfunded mandate by requiring counties to cover the costs of translation services, bilingual printed materials, targeted voter outreach, and hiring and training bilingual election judges without providing additional resources.

HB 983 directs the State Board of Elections (SBE) to determine when local election boards must provide bilingual election materials and assistance. SBE must evaluate voter demographics and require local election offices to offer ballots, instructions, notices, and other election-related materials in additional languages where a significant portion of the population has limited English proficiency. Additionally, the bill mandates bilingual election judges at polling places, as specified.

The governor's fiscal plan shifts significant costs onto counties, which already fund the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, infrastructure, public safety, and other essential services. These additional mandates place even greater pressure on local budgets, forcing difficult trade-offs that could undermine core government functions.

As drafted, HB 983 leaves counties with no choice but to fund these new requirements, competing for limited local resources against essential services like public health, education, and roadway safety. Without dedicated State funding, counties must divert resources from other critical election functions to comply with these mandates.

As such, MACo urges an amendment to require State funding to implement these mandates. A well-resourced approach will ensure local election boards meet these obligations without compromising election operations or straining limited local resources.

Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** report on HB 983. MACo's proposed amendments are included on the following page.

MACo PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO HB 983

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 3, after line 8, insert:

“ (A) THE STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS SHALL REIMBURSE LOCAL BOARDS OF ELECTIONS FOR 100 PERCENT OF THE COSTS INCURRED TO IMPLEMENT THE LANGUAGE-RELATED ASSISTANCE REQUIREMENTS UNDER THIS SECTION, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO TRANSLATION SERVICES, BILINGUAL ELECTION MATERIALS, VOTER OUTREACH, AND THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF BILINGUAL ELECTION JUDGES.”.