

Legislation Text

File #: 210657, **Version:** 0

Calling for the Committee on Law and Government to hold hearings to examine the feasibility of offering election materials in additional languages, exploring ballot randomization, and enabling safer and more secure elections to adequately prepare for and participate in local, state, and federal elections.

WHEREAS, Nearly one hundred and fifty thousand Philadelphians are Limited English proficiency (LEP). Between 47,206 and 87,732 LEP citizens of voting age in Philadelphia will benefit from expanded language accommodation, especially for Philadelphia's largest LEP immigrant populations who speak Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Haitian, French, and Russian, and;

WHEREAS, the landmark civil rights legislation Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act recognizes that citizens of language minorities are part of marginalized communities who have been effectively excluded from participation in the electoral process, and thus ensures LEP voters have equal language access to exercise the fundamental right to vote in our democracy; and,

WHEREAS, Data shows that immigrant citizens, especially Asian Americans, historically participate in elections at lower rates than average. Given census data from 2020, Mandarin will most likely become a required supported language in Philadelphia this upcoming election, under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, similar to Spanish and English; and,

WHEREAS, Within neighborhoods across Philadelphia there are linguistic communities that have significant populations of voters who are limited-English proficiency and speak languages like Mandarin, Russian, and Haitian; and,

WHEREAS, Only 66% of Philadelphia's 1 million+ voters participated in the 2020 general election, as tens of thousands of eligible voters were discouraged from participating in the process because of language-related barriers; and,

WHEREAS, Local immigrant-led organizations found significant boosts in participation of constituent voters with pilot provisions of ballot translations and voting guidance materials In-language but can only reach a small segment of all eligible LEP voters; and,

WHEREAS, Philadelphia's new voting machines cost taxpayers nearly \$30 million and are compatible with up to 16 languages; and,

WHEREAS, Many states and municipalities with significant clusters of populations of limited English proficient voters have begun instituting measures to provide language access in voting services that reach beyond Federal requirements; and,

WHEREAS, A candidate's randomly selected ballot position can be an important determining factor in traditionally low-turnout elections. In crowded elections, where most voters often have little information about each candidate, a ballot position in the first column can nearly triple a candidates vote total; and,

WHEREAS, A candidate's randomly selected ballot position can have a more significant effect on the outcomes of an election than endorsements from the Democratic City Committee, the Philadelphia Inquirer, or the Philadelphia Bar Association's Judicial Commission; and,

WHEREAS, Randomizing a different ballot order for each of the 66 wards could eliminate about 75% of the ballot-position effect on the results of the election; and,

WHEREAS, Philadelphia elections are secure and protected, but the infrastructure of the election process requires additional attention to ensure election workers are properly trained, election day operations are adequately staffed, and results are quickly produced; and,

WHEREAS, With limited resources, the Philadelphia City Commissioners office works tirelessly to ensure safe elections, and with the awesome responsibility of a swing state in federal elections, additional attention is required to provide fair and effective elections, and;

WHEREAS, Our intent is to explore how providing language services to a broader range of linguistic communities, exploring tactics for ballot randomization, and ensuring safer and more secure elections, can result in greater participation in the democratic process; and, therefore be it,

RESOLVED, That the Committee on Law and Government hold hearings to examine the feasibility of supporting election materials in additional languages, exploring ballot randomization, and enabling safer and more secure elections to adequately prepare for and participate in local, state, and federal elections.