

## **AB 614 (ENG): PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL**

California is seeing an increasing gap between the state's voting and non-voting population. Barriers to voting such as complicated voting materials and unfamiliar voting processes contribute significantly to this gap and pose challenges for the millions of voters who are limited English proficient or new voters. Increased compliance with voting rights laws that are intended to address these barriers will promote a more inclusive democracy.

### **Voting is a Fundamental Right Protected by Key Voting Rights Laws**

- In order to ensure citizens can access their fundamental right to vote, federal and state laws require election officials to provide bilingual voting assistance to voters. For example, the federal Voting Rights Act outlines requirements that help limited English proficient voters participate in the democratic process.
- In addition, state law outlines requirements for translated materials at polling sites and bilingual poll workers. These provisions are an important supplement to the Voting Rights Act and reflect a commitment to enfranchising all of California's uniquely diverse electorate.
- When complied with, these laws facilitate the ability of limited English proficient and first-time voters to exercise their fundamental right to vote. For example, Latino and Filipino American voter registration increased by 21% in San Diego County, and Vietnamese American registration increased by 37%, after the county was brought into compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

### **Unfortunately, Poll Monitoring Efforts Reveal a Lack of Compliance by Jurisdictions**

- Poll monitors deployed by various organizations have observed poll sites failing to meet their legal requirements, resulting in voters being unable to exercise their right to vote. For example, poll sites have been found to:
  - Not provide translated voting materials;
  - Not have bilingual poll workers;
  - Not have trained poll workers; and
  - Fail to provide provisional ballots.
- Without the assistance provided under voting rights laws, limited English proficient citizens have difficulty overcoming the barriers they face. Poll monitors have observed voters leaving poll sites without voting because they did not receive language and other voting assistance.

### **Stronger Monitoring Mechanisms are Needed to Protect Voting Rights**

- The Secretary of State has the authority to require election officials to make reports concerning elections in their jurisdictions and assist elections officials in discharging their duties.
- AB 614 proposes to require elections officials to submit their plans for meeting various voting rights laws, and the Secretary of State shall compile best practices that counties could utilize. This process will assist election officials in having adequate plans for providing language assistance and incorporating best practices in responding to the needs of limited English proficient voters.

AB 614 has many supporters, including the California Association of Clerks and Elections Officials, California Common Cause, MALDEF, and numerous community organizations.