

PRESS RELEASE

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Bill to Promote Voting Rights Passes Legislature

AB 614 Protects Language Assistance for Voters

SACRAMENTO, CA – AB 614 passed the Legislature late last night to mitigate the barriers faced by voters in accessing language assistance in exercising their fundamental right. Authored by Assembly Member Mike Eng and sponsored by Asian Americans for Civil Rights and Equality (AACRE), this bill would establish a reporting mechanism that requires county elections officials to outline their plans for providing language assistance and would also require the Secretary of State to compile best practices as a resource.

Existing federal and state laws require election officials to provide bilingual voting assistance to voters. 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 federal Voting Rights Act.

Unfortunately, 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 translations or bilingual poll workers provided under voting rights laws, citizens needing assistance face tremendous barriers to being able to cast their ballots,” says Eugene Lee, Project Director at Asian Pacific American Legal Center. “Having served as a poll monitor, I have personally observed voters leaving poll sites without voting because they did not receive language and other voting assistance.”

“California is seeing an increasing gap between the state’s voting and non-voting population,” remarks Vincent Pan, Executive Director of Chinese for Affirmative Action. “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. Addressing these barriers is needed to make the ideals of having an inclusive democracy a reality.”

“Despite the number of protections that exist for voters in current law, there are still many reports of failures in meeting legal requirements,” states Angela Chan, Staff Attorney at Asian Law Caucus. “AB 614 is a simple approach that 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.”

AACRE is a partnership of Chinese for Affirmative Action, Asian Pacific American Legal Center, and Asian Law Caucus, dedicated to bringing a voice for California’s diverse APIA community to the state’s capital.

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