

LANGUAGE ACCESS & VOTING RIGHTS

History of the Voting Rights Act

In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) a landmark civil rights law that banned racial discrimination in voting. It also outlawed barriers, like literacy tests, that were targeted to keep people from voting.

The VRA was strengthened to include more protections for voters who use languages other than English: Section 203 which passed in 1975 and Section 208 which passed in 1982.

Section 203: Voting information in your language

- **Section 203** requires certain counties and local jurisdictions, like cities and towns, to provide language assistance to voters.
- Section 203 only applies in cities and counties with many voters who are part of the same language minority and who also struggle with English.
- If Section 203 applies to your city or county then:
 - Polling places must provide all materials, including ballots and signs, in the required languages
 - California, Florida, and Texas must provide Spanish voting materials across the entire state
 - Many cities and counties across the country also require Asian language voting materials.
- This federal law is only the floor. Your state, county, or city may provide additional language assistance.
 - Want to know what languages are available where you vote? Check with your county elections office or call an Election Protection hotline.

If your county does not provide language assistance and you need support, reach out to the Election Protection Hotline:

SPANISH:

888 VE-Y-VOTA

ASIAN LANGUAGES:

888-API-VOTE

ARABIC:

844-YALLA-US

Section 208: You can bring someone to help you vote

- Need help reading or understanding your ballot? You have the right to bring someone to help you in the polling place:
- **Section 208** allows voters who are disabled, blind, or unable to read and write English to bring a person of their choice into the voting booth to provide interpretation
- This person cannot be your employer or your union representative