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**State Government Operations &  
Accountability Committee**

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**HB 2594**

**Brief Description:** Providing assistance to non-English speaking voters.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Hasegawa, McCoy, Santos, Pettigrew, Kenney, Hudgins, Upthegrove, Hunt, O'Brien, Haigh, Kagi and Dickerson.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires that counties provide election materials in a language other than English if more than 3.75 percent of the voting population of the county belong to a single language minority community and have limited English abilities; or more than 7,500 voting-age citizens belong to a single language community and have limited English abilities and the illiteracy rate of the citizens in the language group is higher than the national illiteracy rate.

**Hearing Date:** 1/25/06

**Staff:** Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

**Background:**

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires a state or political subdivision to provide registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials relating to the electoral process, including ballots, in the language of an applicable minority group as well as in English. This law applies if more than 10,000 or over 5 percent of the total voting age citizens in a county are members of a single minority language group and are limited in English proficiency. In Washington, four counties are required to provide voting materials in additional languages: Adams, Franklin, and Yakima counties must provide materials in Spanish, and King County must provide materials in Chinese. The provisions of Section 203 expire in 2007.

**Summary of Bill:**

The county auditor must provide bilingual voting registration forms, ballots, and all voting materials for any language group in the county in which:

- more than 3.75 percent of the voting age citizens belong to a single language minority community and have limited English abilities; or

- more than 7,500 voting-age citizens belong to a single language community and have limited English abilities and the illiteracy rate of the citizens in the language group is higher than the national illiteracy rate.

If more than 3 percent of the voting age population in a county speak a common native language other than English, the county must recruit staff members and poll workers fluent in that native language and English to assist with elections.

A voter who does not speak English may use an interpreter to communicate with election officials and receive assistance at the voting booth.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Preliminary fiscal note available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.