
State Government Committee

HB 2863

Brief Description: Providing certain public notices in other than English.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, Veloria, Kenney, Pettigrew, Murray, Darneille and Upthegrove.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires state agencies to provide public notices regarding public health, safety, or welfare, in a language other than English if a significant segment of the affected community or area is of limited English proficiency and speaks a language other than English.

Hearing Date: 2/3/04

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

State law provides that non-English speaking persons involved in legal proceedings must be provided with interpreters. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the Office of Administrative Hearings are responsible for ensuring that bilingual services are provided to non-English speaking applicants and recipients of social services to the extent necessary that persons are not denied services or benefits because of their inability to speak English. Initial client contact materials inform clients in all primary languages of the availability of interpretation services for non-English speaking persons, and basic informational pamphlets are translated into all primary languages. According to the DSHS, primary languages currently include Chinese, Laotian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, and Russian.

Under the Worker and Community Right to Know Act, the Department of Labor must prepare and make available to employers or the public, upon request, a translation in any of the five most common foreign languages used in the workplace of written materials regarding safety and hazard communication standards. Under this same act, employers are to make reasonable efforts to post any notices in the employees' native languages.

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 state, 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.

Summary of Bill:

State agencies must provide public notices concerning health, safety, and welfare in languages other than English when a significant segment of the affected community is of limited English proficiency and speaks a language other than English. "Significant segment" is defined as five percent or more of the citizens living in the affected community or area who speak a language other than English, or 10,000 or more individuals residing in the county who speak a language other than English.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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