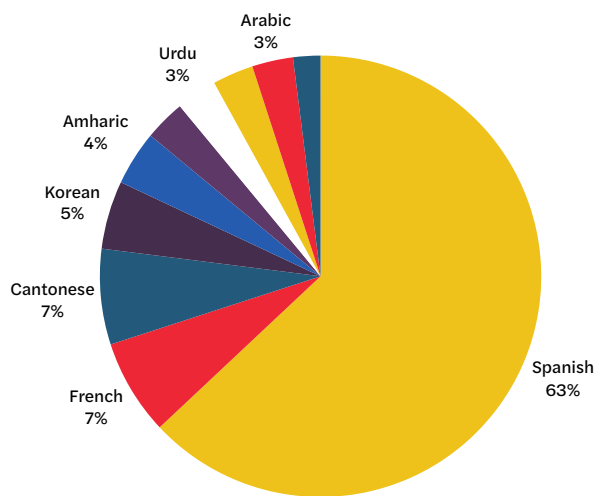


Expand Language Access in Maryland Elections



While we have worked to pass reforms that have made our elections more accessible, **Maryland voters only benefit if the options for voting and overall process are in a language they can understand.** The 2020 census confirmed that Maryland is the most diverse state on the east coast, with 136 languages and dialects spoken within our state borders.



Our top five languages spoken (besides English) include:

- Spanish (~492,000 speakers)
- French (~58,500 speakers)
- Chinese (~52,000 speakers)
- Korean (~38,000 speakers)
- Amharic (~30,000 speakers).

The Maryland General Assembly should change the threshold to 2% or 4,000 citizens of voting age.

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires that counties provide election materials to specific language minority groups that meet the populations threshold. The language minority groups in a specific county must be more than 10,000 citizens of voting age or 5% voting age population. As of now, only Montgomery and Prince George's County are required to translate to Spanish. Changing the threshold to 2% or 4,000 citizens of voting age will create more inclusive elections that ensure all citizens are able to vote, regardless of English proficiency.

Examples of states that have changed their threshold or expanded translation services:

- New York (2% or 4,000)
- Connecticut (2% or 4,000)
- Colorado (2.5% or 2,000)
- California (3%)
- Expanded language programs: Florida, York County PA, Washington DC, Michigan, Oregon

Examples of Maryland counties that may potentially be impacted:

- Most, if not all, counties would be required to translate to Spanish
- Montgomery County may be required to translate to Cantonese and Korean if we pass the 2% threshold – or the above languages, (Amharic, French and others) if we pass the 4,000 threshold

What will the **Multilingual Elections Act** do?

Lowers the Threshold for Required Translations:

Maryland elections are truly inclusive when all voters have access to voting information. Under this legislation, the language threshold would be changed to 2% or 4,000 of the citizens voting age population. The State Board of Elections (SBE) would determine the languages to be translated in each county and notify the local boards of elections. Once notified, the local boards are to translate all election-related materials meeting the language assistance threshold for their county. Translation of ballots are not required, but allowed. Local boards would be required to translate sample ballots and make them available online for voters.

1 in every 5
Marylanders speaks
a language other
than English at
home.



Allows for Public Review of Translated Materials

The accuracy of translations is important. Under this legislation, SBE would be required to establish a process that allows for public input and stakeholder engagement when determining covered languages and review of translated election materials before dissemination.

Establishes a Telephone Interpreter Hotline

Even with translated materials, voters should have the option to request support from a trained nonpartisan interpreter. Under this legislation, SBE would be required to establish a telephone interpreter hotline. The hotline is to be made available from at least the start of the early voting period through Election Day. Hotline interpreters are to provide translations in all languages meeting the established threshold throughout the state. SBE is to ensure the security and integrity of the hotline.



Requires Signage at Polling Places

Maryland voters are only able to take advantage of translation services if they are aware. Under this legislation, local boards of elections will be required to post signage at all vote centers and precinct polling locations during early voting and on Election Day, in languages that meet the threshold in that county. The signs are to be posted in visible locations to notify voters that language assistance and interpreters are available.

