

§ 10503. Bilingual election requirements

(a) Congressional findings and declaration of policy

The Congress finds that, through the use of various practices and procedures, citizens of language minorities have been effectively excluded from participation in the electoral process. Among other factors, the denial of the right to vote of such minority group citizens is ordinarily directly related to the unequal educational opportunities afforded them resulting in high illiteracy and low voting participation. The Congress declares that, in order to enforce the guarantees of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution, it is necessary to eliminate such discrimination by prohibiting these practices, and by prescribing other remedial devices.

(b) Bilingual voting materials requirement

(1) Generally

Before August 6, 2032, no covered State or political subdivision shall provide voting materials only in the English language.

(2) Covered States and political subdivisions

(A) Generally

A State or political subdivision is a covered State or political subdivision for the purposes of this subsection if the Director of the Census determines, based on the 2010 American Community Survey census data and subsequent American Community Survey data in 5-year increments, or comparable census data, that—

(i)(I) more than 5 percent of the citizens of voting age of such State or political subdivision are members of a single language minority and are limited-English proficient;

(II) more than 10,000 of the citizens of voting age of such political subdivision are members of a single language minority and are limited-English proficient; or

(III) in the case of a political subdivision that contains all or any part of an Indian reservation, more than 5 percent of the American Indian or Alaska Native citizens of voting age within the Indian reservation are members of a single language minority and are limited-English proficient; and

(ii) the illiteracy rate of the citizens in the language minority as a group is higher than the national illiteracy rate.

(B) Exception

The prohibitions of this subsection do not apply in any political subdivision that has less than 5 percent voting age limited-English proficient citizens of each language minority which comprises over 5 percent of the statewide limited-English proficient population of voting age citizens, unless the political subdivision is a covered political subdivision independently from its State.

(3) Definitions

As used in this section—

(A) the term “voting materials” means registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or

information relating to the electoral process, including ballots;

(B) the term “limited-English proficient” means unable to speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process;

(C) the term “Indian reservation” means any area that is an American Indian or Alaska Native area, as defined by the Census Bureau for the purposes of the 1990 decennial census;

(D) the term “citizens” means citizens of the United States; and

(E) the term “illiteracy” means the failure to complete the 5th primary grade.

(4) Special rule

The determinations of the Director of the Census under this subsection shall be effective upon publication in the Federal Register and shall not be subject to review in any court.

(c) Requirement of voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials and ballots in minority language

Whenever any State or political subdivision subject to the prohibition of subsection (b) of this section provides any registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, it shall provide them in the language of the applicable minority group as well as in the English language: *Provided*, That where the language of the applicable minority group is oral or unwritten or in the case of Alaskan natives and American Indians, if the predominant language is historically unwritten, the State or political subdivision is only required to furnish oral instructions, assistance, or other information relating to registration and voting.

(d) Action for declaratory judgment permitting English-only materials

Any State or political subdivision subject to the prohibition of subsection (b) of this section, which seeks to provide English-only registration or voting materials or information, including ballots, may file an action against the United States in the United States District Court for a declaratory judgment permitting such provision. The court shall grant the requested relief if it determines that the illiteracy rate of the applicable language minority group within the State or political subdivision is equal to or less than the national illiteracy rate.

(e) Definitions

For purposes of this section, the term “language minorities” or “language minority group” means persons who are American Indian, Asian American, Alaskan Natives, or of Spanish heritage.

(Pub. L. 89-110, title II, §203, as added Pub. L. 94-73, title III, §301, Aug. 6, 1975, 89 Stat. 402; amended Pub. L. 97-205, §§2(d), 4, June 29, 1982, 96 Stat. 134; Pub. L. 102-344, §2, Aug. 26, 1992, 106 Stat. 921; Pub. L. 109-246, §§7, 8, July 27, 2006, 120 Stat. 581.)

CODIFICATION

Section was formerly classified to section 1973aa-1a of Title 42, The Public Health and Welfare, prior to editorial reclassification and renumbering as this section.

AMENDMENTS

2006—Subsec. (b)(1). Pub. L. 109-246, §7, substituted “2032” for “2007”.

Subsec. (b)(2)(A). Pub. L. 109-246, §8, substituted “the 2010 American Community Survey census data and subsequent American Community Survey data in 5-year increments, or comparable census data” for “census data” in introductory provisions.

1992—Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 102-344 amended subsec. (b) generally. Prior to amendment, subsec. (b) read as follows: “Prior to August 6, 1992, no State or political subdivision shall provide registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, only in the English language if the Director of the Census determines (i) that more than 5 percent of the citizens of voting age of such State or political subdivision are members of a single language minority and (ii) that the illiteracy rate of such persons as a group is higher than the national illiteracy rate: *Provided*, That the prohibitions of this subsection shall not apply in any political subdivision which has less than five percent voting age citizens of each language minority which comprises over five percent of the statewide population of voting age citizens. For purposes of this subsection, illiteracy means the failure to complete the fifth primary grade. The determinations of the Director of the Census under this subsection shall be effective upon publication in the Federal Register and shall not be subject to review in any court.”

1982—Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 97-205, §4, substituted “Prior to August 6, 1992” for “Prior to August 6, 1985”.

Subsec. (c). Pub. L. 97-205, §2(d), inserted “and American Indians” after “Alaskan natives”.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF 1982 AMENDMENT

Amendment by Pub. L. 97-205 effective June 29, 1982, see section 6 of Pub. L. 97-205, set out as a note under section 10301 of this title.

EXTENSION TO AUGUST 6, 1992, OF PROHIBITION ON USE OF VOTING INSTRUCTIONS, ASSISTANCE, OR OTHER MATERIALS OR INFORMATION IN ENGLISH ONLY; LIMITATIONS BASED ON 1980 CENSUS AND SUBSEQUENT CENSUS DATA

Pub. L. 97-205, §4, June 29, 1982, 96 Stat. 134, provided in part that: “[T]he extension made by this section [amending subsec. (b) of this section] shall apply only to determinations made by the Director of the Census under clause (i) of section 203(b) [subsec. (b)(i) of this section] for members of a single language minority who do not speak or understand English adequately enough to participate in the electoral process when such a determination can be made by the Director of the Census based on the 1980 and subsequent census data.”

§ 10504. Judicial relief; civil actions by the Attorney General; three-judge district court; appeal to Supreme Court

Whenever the Attorney General has reason to believe that a State or political subdivision (a) has enacted or is seeking to administer any test or device as a prerequisite to voting in violation of the prohibition contained in section 10501 of this title, or (b) undertakes to deny the right to vote in any election in violation of section 10502 or 10503 of this title, he may institute for the United States, or in the name of the United States, an action in a district court of the United States, in accordance with sections 1391 through 1393¹ of title 28, for a restraining order, a preliminary or permanent injunction, or such other order as he deems appropriate. An action under this subsection shall be heard and deter-

mined by a court of three judges in accordance with the provisions of section 2284 of title 28 and any appeal shall be to the Supreme Court.

(Pub. L. 89-110, title II, §204, formerly §203, as added Pub. L. 91-285, §6, June 22, 1970, 84 Stat. 317; renumbered §204 and amended Pub. L. 94-73, title III, §§302, 303, title IV, §406, Aug. 6, 1975, 89 Stat. 403, 405.)

REFERENCES IN TEXT

Section 1393 of title 28, referred to in text, was repealed by Pub. L. 100-702, title X, §1001(a), Nov. 19, 1988, 102 Stat. 4664.

CODIFICATION

Section was formerly classified to section 1973aa-2 of Title 42, The Public Health and Welfare, prior to editorial reclassification and renumbering as this section. Some section numbers referenced in amendment notes below reflect the classification of such sections prior to their editorial reclassification to this title.

AMENDMENTS

1975—Pub. L. 94-73 inserted reference to section 1973aa-1a of this title and substituted reference to section 2284 of title 28 for reference to section 2282 of title 28.

§ 10505. Penalty

Whoever shall deprive or attempt to deprive any person of any right secured by section 10501, 10502, or 10503 of this title shall be fined not more than \$5,000, or imprisoned not more than five years, or both.

(Pub. L. 89-110, title II, §205, formerly §204, as added Pub. L. 91-285, §6, June 22, 1970, 84 Stat. 317; renumbered §205 and amended Pub. L. 94-73, title III, §§302, 304, Aug. 6, 1975, 89 Stat. 403.)

CODIFICATION

Section was formerly classified to section 1973aa-3 of Title 42, The Public Health and Welfare, prior to editorial reclassification and renumbering as this section. Some section numbers referenced in amendment notes below reflect the classification of such sections prior to their editorial reclassification to this title.

AMENDMENTS

1975—Pub. L. 94-73 inserted reference to section 1973aa-1a of this title.

§ 10506. Separability

If any provision of chapters 103 to 107 of this title or the application of any provision thereof to any person or circumstance is judicially determined to be invalid, the remainder of chapters 103 to 107 of this title or the application of such provision to other persons or circumstances shall not be affected by such determination.

(Pub. L. 89-110, title II, §206, formerly §205, as added Pub. L. 91-285, §6, June 22, 1970, 84 Stat. 318; renumbered §206, Pub. L. 94-73, title III, §302, Aug. 6, 1975, 89 Stat. 403.)

CODIFICATION

Section was formerly classified to section 1973aa-4 of Title 42, The Public Health and Welfare, prior to editorial reclassification and renumbering as this section.

¹ See References in Text note below.