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MORE ASIAN AMERICAN VOTERS TO RECEIVE LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE IN ELECTIONS

Census Bureau releases new list of counties required to provide bilingual voting assistance

WASHINGTON-- Today, the U.S. Census Bureau released the new official list of jurisdictions that are required to provide bilingual voting assistance under Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act. A review of the list by the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice) reveals that Section 203 now covers 43 Asian American language groups located in 22 counties, boroughs, census areas or cities. This includes 17 new Asian American language groups that have been added to Section 203 coverage since the previous list was released in 2002.

“The addition of Asian Indian and Bangladeshi as covered language groups, neither of which was previously covered, as well as the addition of counties in Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada and New Jersey, states not previously covered by Section 203 for Asian American language groups, reflects the rapid growth of the Asian American community across the country,” said Eugene Lee, voting rights project director at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center. “We expected more jurisdictions to be covered this time around and hope this trend continues in future determinations.”

Section 203 requires jurisdictions to provide language assistance if the number of eligible voters qualifying for such assistance meets certain threshold tests, as determined by the Census Bureau based on American Community Survey data -- an ongoing and in-depth survey that the Census Bureau sends to households to collect detailed data on the American population. Language assistance must be provided both pre-Election Day and on Election Day and includes translated written materials, such as sample ballots, ballots and signage, bilingual assistance at poll sites and publicity of the availability of language assistance to the covered language community.

“Section 203 breaks down language barriers by allowing voters to understand and participate in the election system,” said Terry Ao Minnis, director of census and voting programs at the Asian American Justice Center. “However, proper implementation is critical to the success of Section 203, and Advancing Justice will be working with community groups and election officials to ensure that Section 203-covered jurisdictions provide robust language assistance to limited English-speaking voters. In the coming months, Advancing Justice will also release a handbook that provides community organizations with helpful information about Section 203.”

Since the last determination in 2002, there are seven new counties, boroughs, census areas or cities covered under Section 203 for Asian American language groups. There are 17 new Asian American language groups covered under Section 203 and one Asian American language group that is no longer covered under Section 203. Currently, Section 203 covers Asian American voters in the following jurisdictions and for the following language groups:

Jurisdiction**Covered Asian Language Group**Alaska:⁺Aleutians East Borough
Aleutians West Census AreaFilipino*
Filipino*

California:

Alameda County
Los Angeles CountyChinese, Filipino*, Vietnamese*
Asian Indian*, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Other
Asian – Not specified*, VietnameseOrange County
Sacramento County
San Diego County
San Francisco County
San Mateo County
Santa Clara CountyChinese, Korean, Vietnamese
Chinese*
Chinese*, Filipino, Vietnamese*
Chinese
Chinese
Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese

Hawaii:

Honolulu County
Maui CountyChinese, Filipino, Japanese
Filipino

Illinois:

Cook County

Asian Indian*, Chinese

Massachusetts:

Quincy City

Chinese*

Michigan:

Hamtramck City

Bangladeshi*

Nevada:

Clark County

Filipino*

New Jersey:

Bergen County

Korean*

New York:

Kings County
New York County
Queens CountyChinese
Chinese
Asian Indian*, Chinese, Korean

Texas:

Harris County

Chinese*, Vietnamese

Washington:

King County

Chinese, Vietnamese*

* Asian American language groups marked with an asterisk are newly covered under Section 203

+ Kodiak Island Borough in Alaska (Filipino) is no longer covered under Section 203.

“We are pleased to see the new Section 203 determinations released at least three months before the 2012 primary cycle begins,” said Christopher Punongbayan, deputy director at the Asian Law Caucus. “This allows jurisdictions plenty of time to make language assistance preparations for the important upcoming election cycle.”

Andy Kang, senior staff attorney at the Asian American Institute, added, “While Section 203 has been a critical law in addressing barriers that Asian Americans face in exercising their fundamental right to vote, there are many other communities not yet covered by Section 203. Non-covered jurisdictions should consider what voluntary assistance can be provided to limited English-speaking voters. Additionally, looking ahead five years to when the next Section 203 determination will be made, community leaders in non-covered jurisdictions should continue education and outreach efforts around participation in the American Community Survey.”

More information about Section 203 can be found at <http://www.advancingequality.org/section-203>. The full list of Section 203-covered jurisdictions can be found at http://www.census.gov/rdo/pdf/2011_26293.pdf.

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The Asian American Center for Advancing Justice (www.advancingjustice.org) is comprised of the Asian American Justice Center in Washington, D.C. (www.advancingequality.org), the Asian American Institute in Chicago (www.aaichicago.org), the Asian Law Caucus (www.asianlawcaucus.org) in San Francisco and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (www.apalc.org) in Los Angeles. The mission of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice is to promote a fair and equitable society for all by working for civil and human rights and empowering Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other underserved communities.