

HB20-1081 Multi-Lingual Ballot

Good afternoon Chairman Kennedy and committee members. I am Jean Nofles, volunteer state president for AARP of Colorado and its 670,000+ members in this state.

AARP strongly supports HB20-1081. I am here to testify in strong support of this bill.

Voting is one the most obvious characteristics of a democratic society. In furtherance of democracy¹, AARP deeply believes in free and unfettered voting and strongly supports extending the privilege and right of voting to all citizens. All citizens are also potential electors.

This bill opens a pathway for all citizens, potential electors, to engage in participatory democracy. Multi-lingual ballots and interpreters when necessary, open a pathway for full comprehension of complicated, convoluted ballot language. This bill provides a method for our multi-lingual citizens/electors to cast, not just votes, but EDUCATED votes. This is a GOOD thing.

AARP's formal policy is that "Policymakers should encourage and promote maximum participation in the electoral process. They should adopt voter registration and voting systems and procedures that expand the range of voting choices."²

That is what this bill does...adopt a voting system with multi-lingual ballots, that expands the range of voting options.

This bill takes on greater importance as we move into the primary season and on to the November 2020 elections. All of our citizens must be allowed the opportunity to choose those who will govern them. That choice should be an informed choice.

In this time of budget compression, understand that this bill has a tiny fiscal note. We, as a state, will pay very little for a tremendous benefit for its citizens.

AARP supports this bill and I encourage you to strongly support it with a "YES" vote.

Thank you for listening.

¹ System of government in which citizens vote directly in or elect representatives to form a governing body, sometimes called "rule of the majority"; Merriam-Webster

² [AARP Electronic Policy Book](#)

AARP supports this bill and I encourage you to strongly support it with a “YES” vote.

Thank you for listening.

HB20-1081 – Multilingual Ballot Access – Support Testimony

My name is Amanda Gonzalez and I am the executive director of Colorado Common Cause

I do the work I do at Common Cause and our 22,000 members throughout Colorado stand with me because we are doing the original civil rights work. Generations of American have fought and died for our right to vote, the freedom to choose our leaders, and the right to speak up for our beliefs.

My grandmother was a naturalized citizen from San Luis Portosi, Mexico. My dad was born in southern California and has always been a US Citizen. The primary language that my dad and his siblings originally spoke at home was Spanish. In kindergarten, my dad came home from school with a note pinned to him that said "Joe speaks too much Spanish at school, speak English at home." 40 years later my grandmother told me that story with both the kindness and emotional armor that comes with being a naturalized citizen...someone who is proud of their heritage and also proud to be an American.

Language is a complicated thing for many families. It's not only complicated, but it's been a tool for discrimination for a large part of our country's history.

When Congress amended the Voting Rights Act in 1975 by adding Section 203, it found that "through the use of various practices and procedures, citizens of language minorities have been effectively excluded from participation in the electoral process....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."¹

Section 203 of the VRA is a great start but it currently only requires four counties to provide election materials in a language other than English. Colorado Common Cause works with the Just Vote Election Protection Coalition to answer an election protection hotline in English and Spanish. Every election cycle voters call us because they cannot read their ballot and for most of them we don't have any good resource to provide.

According to the American Community Survey conducted by the US Census Bureau there are more than 82,000 eligible voters in Colorado who do not speak English very well and are effectively denied access to the ballot because they live in counties where election materials are provided only in English. For many people who speak a language other than English, the ballot is incomprehensible even if they read some English. These voters are excluded from full participation in our democracy.

The effect of this is magnified during a time of social distancing. In the 2020 election voters may not be able to have their friends or cousin over to help them read their ballot. They may not be able to go to their church or local community center for help. By denying them access to translated sample ballots you may very well be requiring these voters to risk their health if they want to exercise their right to vote.

This bill signals to all eligible voters that their voice and their vote is important. And we believe it will make a big difference. In San Diego County voter registration among citizens of Vietnamese descent increased by 40 percent after the County agreed to voluntarily provide additional language access in Vietnamese. Navajo voter turnout increased by 26 percent between 2000 and 2004 after Apache

¹ The United State Department of Justice <https://www.justice.gov/crt/language-minority-citizens>

County, AZ entered into a consent decree with DOJ to resolve the lack of language assistance in voting activities.

I hope you'll stand with all voters today to ensure that they have the resources they need to participate in our elections. I encourage you to vote yes on HB20-1081.

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DISABILITY LAW
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DISABILITY LAW COLORADO'S POSITION STATEMENT ON HB 20-1081

Who is Disability Law Colorado?

Disability Law Colorado is a Colorado nonprofit organization established to protect and promote the rights of individuals with disabilities. It serves as the federally-mandated and state-designated Protection and Advocacy System for people with disabilities as authorized by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. §15043, *et. seq.*), the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act (42 U.S.C. §10801, *et. seq.*), and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals Rights section of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. §794e, *et. seq.*).

SB 19-235

HB 20-1081 will have a great impact on the disability community. Disability can impact anyone, including those voters whose primary language is not English. This bill will ensure that more voters with disabilities will have equal access to Colorado's election process.

Support for HB 20-1081

HB 20-1081 brings us closer to including more people with disabilities in our elections by eliminating unjust and discriminatory barriers.

For these reasons, we support HB 20-1081 and urge you to vote YES!

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