



# Alaska Native Language Speakers Have Voting Rights!

As Alaska Natives, our votes impact our community resources, and whether elected officials respect our people and our rights. It is essential that people who speak our traditional languages have a say. That is why section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires several voting areas or “jurisdictions” in Alaska to provide language assistance to speakers of traditional Native languages.

## WHAT IS REQUIRED?

Federal law requires that Native language speakers who are not comfortable speaking and reading in English receive language assistance so they may effectively participate in voting. Election officials cannot provide less election information to Native language speaking voters than they provide to English-speaking voters.

## LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE SHOULD INCLUDE:

- ✓ Translation of public service announcements and election information on websites
- ✓ Translation of voter guides and other written materials
- ✓ Translation of voter registration forms and ballots
- ✓ Language assistance by phone and where you go to cast your vote (your “polling location”)

## LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED FOR SPEAKERS OF THE FOLLOWING LANGUAGES\*:

- Aleut
- Iñupiaq
- Yup'ik



\* Although not required under the section 203 coverage determinations for 2021, a federal court order requires Gwich'in language assistance

See the back of this page for areas where language assistance must be provided

## ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE RIGHTS WIN IN COURT!

Election officials provided a 100-page election pamphlet for English-speaking voters but, for Alaska Native language speakers, only provided a one-page document with the date, time, and location of the election and a notice that language assistance was available. In a lawsuit brought by NARF, a federal court ruled that this was a violation of section 203 of the Voting Rights Act because Native language speakers were provided less election information than English Speakers.

**FOR QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT [VOTE@NARF.ORG](mailto:vote@narf.org)**

## WHERE IS LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE?

“Covered jurisdictions” must provide language assistance. A federal agency called the Census Bureau determines which voting jurisdictions are covered jurisdictions. To make its determinations the Census Bureau looks at “language-minority” populations in each jurisdiction (or in Alaska Native areas or tribal lands lying wholly or partially in a jurisdiction) and considers two things:

- ✓ The size of the language minority population that is not proficient in English; and
- ✓ Below average literacy rates to recognize the impacts of discrimination in education on access to voting

All covered jurisdictions are listed in Federal Regulation at 86.F.R. 69611.

## A NOTE ABOUT “HISTORICALLY UNWRITTEN” NATIVE LANGUAGES:

Many Native languages are historically unwritten, as our cultures are rooted in oral traditions. Under section 203, if a Native language is determined to be historically unwritten (a case-by-case determination) jurisdictions may not have to provide *written* translations of all materials written in English. However, federal courts have determined that written translations may be required if needed to provide complete, accurate, and uniform translations. Additionally, language assistance must still allow Native-language speakers to *effectively* participate in voting and election officials cannot make less information available for Native-language speakers than they do for English-speakers.

Language assistance must allow members of your community who are not comfortable using English to effectively participate in elections and cast an informed vote. If you think your community's right to language assistance has been violated, reach out to [vote@narf.org](mailto:vote@narf.org).

The Alaska jurisdictions that must provide language assistance are listed below. The list is updated every five years. Jurisdictions with an asterisk (\*) are on the 2021 list but were not on the 2016 list for the specified language.<sup>^^</sup>

### ALEUT:

Aleut speakers are entitled to language assistance in

- ✓ Lake and Peninsula Borough\*

### GWICH'IN:

By court order, Gwich'in speakers are entitled to language assistance in

- ✓ Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area (Arctic Village, Beaver, Birch Creek, Chalkyitsik, Circle, Fort Yukon, and Venetie)

### IÑUPIAQ:

Inupiat speakers are entitled to language assistance in

- ✓ North Slope Borough
- ✓ Northwest Arctic Borough
- ✓ Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area

### Yup'ik:

Yup'ik speakers are entitled to language assistance in

✓ Aleutians East Borough	✓ Kodiak Island Borough
✓ Bethel Census Area	✓ Kusilvak Census Area
✓ Bristol Bay Borough	✓ Lake and Peninsula Borough
✓ Dillingham Census Area	✓ Nome Census Area
✓ Kenai Peninsula Borough	



<sup>^^</sup>Some areas that were required to provide language assistance under the 2016 list of covered jurisdictions, are no longer required to assist with one or more languages. Those areas are Aleutians West Census Area for **Aleut**, Bethel Census Area for **Iñupiaq**, Nome Census Area for **Iñupiaq**, Southeast Fairbanks Census Area for Alaskan Athabascan, Kusilvak Census Area for **Iñupiaq**, Valdez-Cordova Census Area for Alaskan Athabascan, and Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area for Alaskan Athabascan. If you can help with language assistance in these areas, contact NARF.