



Choctaw Language Speakers Have Voting Rights!

In Indian Country, 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 certain voting areas or “jurisdictions” in Mississippi to provide language assistance to speakers of the traditional Choctaw language.

WHAT IS REQUIRED?

Federal law requires that Choctaw 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 Choctaw 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:

- Choctaw

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

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 LANGAUGES:

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.

Below, this guide lists the Mississippi voting areas or “jurisdictions” that are required to provide language assistance to Choctaw voters. The assistance must allow members of your community who are not comfortable using English to effectively participate in elections. If you think your community’s right to language assistance has been violated, reach out to vote@narf.org.

The list of jurisdictions that are required to provide language assistance is updated every five years. Jurisdictions with an asterisk (*) are newly covered jurisdictions, meaning they were not on the list of covered jurisdictions in 2016, but were added in 2021.

For jurisdictions in ***bold italics***, the federal government may not prioritize enforcement of language assistance obligations because census data indicate few tribal members live on tribal lands within those jurisdictions.

CHOCTAW:

Choctaw language speakers are entitled to language assistance in

- ✓ *Attala County*
- ✓ *Carroll County**
- ✓ *Jackson County*
- ✓ Jones County
- ✓ Kemper County
- ✓ Leake County
- ✓ Neshoba County
- ✓ Newton County
- ✓ Noxubee County
- ✓ *Scott County*
- ✓ Winston County



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