



# Shoshone Language Speakers Have Voting Rights in Nye County!



In Indian Country, our votes impact our community resources, and whether elected officials respect Native people and Native 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 nearly 100 voting areas or “jurisdictions” across the county to provide language assistance to speakers of traditional Native languages.

## WHAT IS REQUIRED?

Federal law requires that Shoshone language speakers in Nye County 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 Shoshone language speaking voters than they provide to English-speaking voters.

**Example:** Election officials in Alaska provided a 100-page election pamphlet to 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. A federal court ruled that this was a violation of section 203 of the Voting Rights Act because Yup'ik speakers were provided less election information than English-speakers.

## LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE INCLUDES:

- ✓ Translation of 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”)

## 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.

## COVERED JURISDICTIONS

“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.