

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
85R1251 ADM-D

S.B. 148
By: Garcia
State Affairs
4/7/2017
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The federal Voting Rights Act requires that any voter who requires assistance because of visual impairments, disabilities, or literacy skills can be helped in casting a ballot by the person of their choice, as long as it is not their employer or a union leader. However, a Texas provision allows voters to select an "interpreter" to help them communicate with an election officer and "accompany the voter to the voting station for the purpose of translating the ballot to the voter." But the interpreter must be registered to vote in the same county, which prevents some folks from being able to properly vote. Twenty-five point seven percent of Texas households that speak Asian or other Pacific Island languages are considered limited English-speaking households, according to recent United States census estimates. Almost 27 percent of households that speak Indo-European or other languages are limited English-speaking households.

S.B. 148 amends the Election Code to allow a voter to select an interpreter of their choice as long as the interpreter is not their employer, or an officer of a labor union the voter is a member of. If the voter does not have a self-selected interpreter, the election officer must appoint an interpreter as long as that interpreter is registered to vote in the county or an adjacent county.

Support: Texas Association of Election Administrators; Texas NAACP; League of Women Voters of Texas; Texas Democratic Party; AFL-CIO.

As proposed, S.B. 148 amends current law relating to eligibility to serve as an interpreter in an election.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 61.032, Election Code, to authorize a voter to communicate through an interpreter selected by the voter or, if the voter has not selected an interpreter, an interpreter be appointed by an election officer, if an election officer who attempts to communicate with a voter does not understand the language used by the voter.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 61.033, Election Code, as follows:

Sec. 61.033. ELIGIBILITY TO SERVE AS INTERPRETER. Provides that to be eligible to serve as an interpreter, a person:

- (1) if selected by the voter, may be any person other than the voter's employer, an agent of the voter's employer, or an officer or agent of a labor union to which the voter belongs; or
- (2) if appointed to serve as an interpreter by an election officer, is required to be a registered voter of the county the voter needing assistance resides in or a registered voter of an adjacent county.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2017.