

Assembly Bill No. 67

CHAPTER 259

An act to amend Sections 7292, 7295, 7295.4, 7296, 7296.4, 7299.1, 7299.4, 7299.5, and 7299.8 of the Government Code, relating to bilingual services.

[Approved by Governor October 5, 2007. Filed with
Secretary of State October 5, 2007.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 67, Dymally. State and local agencies: bilingual services.

Existing law requires local and state agencies to provide information regarding public services in a non-English language if a substantial number of the public served by the agency are non-English-speaking people. Existing law also requires state agencies to provide reports to the State Personnel Board regarding the provision of information in a non-English language, subject to certain exceptions by the State Personnel Board.

This bill would provide that a person is qualified as a bilingual person, employee, or interpreter for these purposes if the State Personnel Board has tested and certified the person or approved the testing and certification. The bill would provide that local agencies would have discretion to determine who is qualified to provide information in a non-English language. The bill would also authorize additional grounds for the State Personnel Board to exempt state agencies from the reporting requirements.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 7292 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7292. (a) Every state agency, as defined in Section 11000, except the State Compensation Insurance Fund, directly involved in the furnishing of information or the rendering of services to the public whereby contact is made with a substantial number of non-English-speaking people, shall employ a sufficient number of qualified bilingual persons in public contact positions to ensure provision of information and services to the public, in the language of the non-English-speaking person.

(b) For the purposes of this chapter, the furnishing of information or rendering of services includes, but is not limited to, providing public safety, protection, or prevention, administering state benefits, implementing public programs, managing public resources or facilities, holding public hearings, and engaging in any other state program or activity that involves public contact.

SEC. 2. Section 7295 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7295. Any materials explaining services available to the public shall be translated into any non-English language spoken by a substantial number of the public served by the agency. Whenever notice of the availability of materials explaining services available is given, orally or in writing, it shall be given in English and in the non-English language into which any materials have been translated. The determination of when these materials are necessary when dealing with local agencies shall be left to the discretion of the local agency.

SEC. 3. Section 7295.4 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7295.4. Whenever a state agency finds that the factors listed in both subdivisions (a) and (c) or (b) and (c) exist, it shall distribute the applicable written materials in the appropriate non-English language through its local offices or facilities to non-English-speaking persons, or, as an alternative, the state agency may instead elect to furnish translation aids, translation guides, or provide assistance, through use of a qualified bilingual person, at its local offices or facilities in completing English forms or questionnaires and in understanding English forms, letters, or notices:

(a) The written materials, whether forms, applications, questionnaires, letters, or notices solicit or require the furnishing of information from an individual or provide that individual with information.

(b) The information solicited, required, or furnished affects or may affect the individual's rights, duties, or privileges with regard to that agency's services or benefits.

(c) The local office or facility of the agency with which the individual is dealing, serves a substantial number of non-English-speaking persons.

SEC. 4. Section 7296 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7296. (a) As used in this chapter, a "qualified bilingual person," "qualified bilingual employee," or "qualified interpreter" is a person who is proficient in both the English language and the non-English language to be used. For any state agency, "qualified" means one of the following:

(1) A bilingual person or employee who the State Personnel Board has tested and certified as proficient in the ability to understand and convey in English and a non-English language commonly used terms and ideas, including terms and ideas regularly used in state government.

(2) A bilingual employee who was tested and certified by a state agency or other testing authority approved by the State Personnel Board as proficient in the ability to understand and convey in English and a non-English language commonly used terms and ideas, including terms and ideas regularly used in state government.

(3) An interpreter who has met the testing or certification standards established by the State Personnel Board for outside or contract interpreters, as proficient in the ability to communicate commonly used terms and ideas between the English language and the non-English language to be used and has knowledge of basic interpreter practices, including, but not limited to, confidentiality, neutrality, accuracy, completeness, and transparency.

(b) The determination of what constitutes "qualified" for local agencies, shall be left to the discretion of the local agency.

SEC. 5. Section 7296.4 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7296.4. As used in Section 7292, “a sufficient number of qualified bilingual persons in public contact positions” is the number required to provide the same level of services to non-English-speaking persons as is available to English-speaking persons seeking these services. However, where the local office or facility of the state employs the equivalent of 25 or fewer regular, full-time employees, it shall constitute compliance with the requirements of this chapter if a sufficient number of qualified bilingual persons are employed in public contact positions, or as qualified interpreters to assist those in those positions, to provide the same level of services to non-English-speaking persons as is available to English-speaking persons seeking the services from the office or facility.

SEC. 6. Section 7299.1 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7299.1. State agencies may, utilizing existing funds, contract for telephone-based interpretation services in addition to employing qualified bilingual persons in public contact positions.

SEC. 7. Section 7299.4 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7299.4. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision in this chapter, each state agency shall conduct an assessment and develop and update an implementation plan that complies with the requirements of this chapter.

(b) Each agency shall conduct a survey of each of its local offices every two years to determine all of the following:

- (1) The number of public contact positions in each local office.
- (2) The number of qualified bilingual employees in public contact positions in each local office, and the languages they speak, other than English.
- (3) The number and percentage of non-English-speaking people served by each local office, broken down by native language.
- (4) The number of anticipated vacancies in public contact positions.
- (5) Whether the use of other available options, including contracted telephone-based interpretation services, in addition to qualified bilingual persons in public contact positions, is serving the language needs of the people served by the agency.
- (6) A list of all written materials that are required to be translated or otherwise made accessible to non- or limited-English-speaking individuals by Sections 7295.2 and 7295.4.
- (7) A list of materials identified in paragraph (6) that have been translated and languages into which they have been translated.
- (8) The number of additional qualified bilingual public contact staff, if any, needed at each local office to comply with this chapter.
- (9) Any other relevant information requested by the State Personnel Board.

(c) Each agency shall calculate the percentage of non-English-speaking people served by each local office by rounding the percentage arrived at to the nearest whole percentage point.

The survey results shall be reported on forms provided by the State Personnel Board, and delivered to the board not later than October 1 of every even-numbered year beginning with 2008.

(d) Beginning in 2009 and in every odd-numbered year thereafter, each state agency shall develop an implementation plan that, at a minimum, addresses all of the following:

(1) The name, position, and contact information of the employee designated by the agency to be responsible for overseeing implementation of the plan.

(2) A description of the agency's procedures for identifying written materials that need to be translated.

(3) A description of the agency's procedures for identifying language needs at local offices and assigning qualified bilingual staff.

(4) A description of how the agency recruits qualified bilingual staff.

(5) A description of any training the agency provides to its staff on the provision of services to non- or limited-English-speaking individuals.

(6) A detailed description of how the agency plans to address any deficiencies in meeting the requirements of this chapter, including, but not limited to, the failure to translate written materials or employ sufficient numbers of qualified bilingual employees in public contact positions at local offices, the proposed actions to be taken to address the deficiencies, and the proposed dates by when the deficiencies can be remedied.

(7) A description of the agency's procedures for accepting and resolving complaints of an alleged violation of this chapter.

(8) A description of how the agency complies with any federal or other state laws that require the provision of linguistically accessible services to the public.

(9) Any other relevant information requested by the State Personnel Board.

(e) In developing its implementation plan in 2003, each state agency may rely upon data gathered from its 2002 survey.

(f) Each state agency shall submit its implementation plan to the State Personnel Board no later than October 1 of each applicable year. The board shall review each plan, and, if it determines that the plan fails to address the identified deficiencies, the board shall order the agency to supplement or make changes to its plan. A state agency that has been determined to be deficient shall report to the State Personnel Board every six months on its progress in addressing the identified deficiencies.

(g) If the board determines that a state agency has not made reasonable progress toward complying with this chapter, the board may issue orders that it deems appropriate to effectuate the purposes of this chapter.

SEC. 8. Section 7299.5 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7299.5. The State Personnel Board may exempt state agencies from the requirements of Section 7299.4, where the State Personnel Board determines that any of the following conditions apply:

(a) The agency's primary mission does not include responsibility for furnishing information or rendering services to the public.

(b) The agency has consistently received such limited public contact with the non-English-speaking public that it has not been required to employ bilingual staff under Section 7292 and the agency employs fewer than the equivalent of 25 full-time employees in public contact positions.

In order to receive an exemption, each state agency shall annually petition the State Personnel Board for the exemption and receive approval in writing by the date established by the board. An agency may receive an exemption for up to five consecutive surveys or implementation plans, if it demonstrates that it meets the requirements of subdivision (a) or (b), and provides all required documentation to the State Personnel Board.

SEC. 9. Section 7299.8 of the Government Code is amended to read:

7299.8. It is not the intent of the Legislature in enacting this chapter to prohibit the establishment of bilingual positions, or printing of materials, or use of qualified interpreters, where less than 5 percent of the people served do not speak English or are unable to communicate effectively, as determined appropriate by the state or local agency. It is not the intent of the Legislature in enacting this chapter to require that all public contact positions be filled with qualified bilingual persons.