

The VOTE (Voting Opportunity and Translation Equity) Ordinance

Sponsored by: Commissioner Larry Johnson

WHEREAS, DeKalb County is committed to the values of equity, engagement, and excellence; and

WHEREAS, 18.95% of residents of DeKalb County speak a language other than English at home; and

WHEREAS, research suggests that civic engagement is a significant predictor of economic opportunity across states; and

WHEREAS, the United States Congress found in Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, P.L. 94- 73, 42 U.S.C. §1973aa-1a, that, "through the use of various practices and procedures, citizens of language minorities have been effectively excluded from participation in the electoral process;" and

WHEREAS, DeKalb County complies with the Voting Rights Act, which dictates which languages are translated for ballots and voting materials; and

WHEREAS, the Voting Rights Act has not been updated since 1992, and only requires that covered states or political subdivisions translate voting materials in English and for persons of American Indian, Asian American, Alaskan Native or Spanish heritage who meet a threshold of 10,000 or more limited English speakers. Additionally, state or political subdivisions are only required to evaluate these numbers every ten years following the decennial census.

WHEREAS, research shows that targeted minority language voting materials and related outreach can improve voter turnout. According to a report by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, after coverage provided under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was expanded in 1992, the number of Asian Americans registered to vote increased dramatically. As cited in the journal Legislation and Public Policy vol. 10:195 2006, "in covered areas where the Department of Justice brought section 203 enforcement actions, participation not only in voting but in running for political office increased dramatically;" and

WHEREAS, Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act allows voters who need assistance to vote by reason of blindness, disability, or inability to read or write may be given assistance by a person of the voter's choice, other than the voter's employer or agent of the employer or officer or agent of the voter's union; and

WHEREAS, the VRE serves as the chief election authority for the entire county; and

WHEREAS, the right to vote is a fundamental principle of our democracy.