

Testimony

Members of the Committee,

My name is Nelsie Yang. I am the Councilmember representing Saint Paul Ward 6. As a Council Member and Hmong American daughter of refugees, I'm here today to testify why it's important for this legislation to pass.

Whatever our color, background or zip code, most of us believe voters pick our leaders -- our leaders do not get to pick their voters. When it comes to our elections, we want a transparent and accessible process we can trust where we all have equal freedom to vote whether we're a 6th generation Minnesotan or someone who recently calls Minnesota home.

Minnesota has a long history of welcoming new Americans from all over the world. Diversity of background and perspective are integral in creating a full, thriving democracy. We should ensure everyone has a say in who represents them and the policies that directly impact their communities.

Growing up as the main translator for my parents during the election season, I witnessed the hard and intimidating situations my parents faced when voting. For those of us who are literate in English, we don't worry about language barriers, who to speak to as soon as we walk into the polling location, nor how to mark our ballot. These are only a handful of many barriers that people who don't speak English as their first language may run in to, and we are already seeing that that's been the case for a long time. This is why I began volunteering my time during the elections six years ago. I wanted to make sure my refugee parents, along with the entire Hmong community, had a great experience throughout the voting process and that they could have the same smooth experience you and I have.

The provision that requires the Secretary of State to prepare voting instructions in languages other than English is a simple and necessary step to ensure our elections are welcoming and accessible to all eligible Minnesotans.

Community leaders have been working hard to provide translation services to guide folks with limited-English knowledge through the voting process. However, these volunteers can't be everywhere at once. It's common-sense to have language resources available to help our voters feel confident and proud of casting their ballot.

The [Minnesota Compass](#) shows that amongst the population for five year olds and older in my county district, nearly 57% speak English only, nearly 44% speak a language other than English, and nearly 24% speak English less than "very well." In 2018, more than 11% of Minnesotans (5 or older) spoke a language other than English at home ([Minnesota State Demographic Center](#)). Diversity in our communities is our largest asset. Ensuring that we create structures that support each other is how we can build communities that are wholesome. Without the resources to guide folks through an already complicated process, we are disenfranchising entire communities. Districts with high new-Minnesotan populations across the state are impacted, not just in the Twin Cities -- Rochester to Owatonna; Eden Prairie to Mankato ([MSDC Government Report](#)).

I hope you will consider adopting this provision in your negotiations. It's time for our laws to reflect our values.

Sincerely,

Nelsie Yang
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