

GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS BALLOT TRANSLATION BILL

Boston home-rule petition designed to expand voter participation

BOSTON- Saturday, July 31, 2010 - Governor Deval Patrick today signed into law legislation requiring the City of Boston to prepare ballots in Chinese and Vietnamese for all federal, state and local elections. The measure, a Boston home-rule petition, also calls for Chinese ballots to be transliterated by the Boston Board of Election Commissioners to include Chinese characters that represent the phonetic equivalent of the syllables of an English name.

"This law removes a language barrier that often discourages people from taking part in the electoral process," said Governor Patrick. "I am proud to sign this bill because I believe it will make it easier to vote and allow more of our citizens to actively in engage in their government."

The new law mandates these ballots in polling places in which there are 35 or more registered voters with Chinese surnames or 30 or more with Vietnamese surnames. The measure takes effect on January 1, 2011. Supporters of the law say it is needed to allow many elderly Asian-Americans who do not read English to participate in the voting process.

"Today we achieved a great victory as the Governor signed into law legislation to ensure equal voting rights for Asian-Americans-particularly elder Asian-Americans-in the City of Boston," said Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz, who represents Chinatown and sponsored the bilingual ballots bill in the Senate. "I want to thank the Governor for supporting the concerns of our residents so consistently. I also want to thank the members of the Coalition for Asian American Voting Rights for their incredible and long-running work on this bill, and the Mayor, the City Councillors, and my Senate co-sponsors of the bill, for all the support they've put behind it. It's taken a great team to bring the bill to where it is today."

"This bill is about civic engagement. I think that's what we're all trying to do here. This is one segment of the population that language is a barrier for them. This bill will allow them to participate to the fullest extent," said Representative Aaron Michlewitz, who joined the Governor and other advocates at the State House bill signing.

"For so many years, we Chinese-speaking voters went to countless hearings and demonstrations to call attention to our voting rights. We are thankful particularly to Sam Yoon, who championed this issue in the City, and to our Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz and Representative Aaron Michlewitz, and with the support of the Governor, that we now can go vote without having someone to go to the booth to translate for us," said Mr. Henry Yee of the Chinatown Resident Association.