

Let's get November's ballot printed in Haitian Creole!

On the November 2022 ballot, I was thrilled to see our state election ballots printed in Vietnamese as well as the usual English. But I wondered, "Randolph has more Haitian Creole speakers than Vietnamese speakers, so why did the ballots get printed only in Vietnamese?" So we made a plan to fix that! Here's how....

We called the Secretary of State's office (and then several more government agencies!) to figure out the rules. There's a federal law that requires printing the ballot in foreign languages if more than 5% of your city's population speaks one foreign language at home. That 5% is determined by the 2020 census, and took effect across Massachusetts and nationwide in 2022. But the only languages that qualify are Spanish, Asian languages (except Arabic), and Native American languages. That means "yes for Vietnamese but no for Haitian Creole."

Could that list of languages be changed? Only by federal legislation ("an Act of Congress"). But we CAN change it at the state/municipal level instead of federally. That's called a "Home Rule Petition," which means an exception to state law for one municipality. That whole process is described here, and the final version of our "Home Rule Petition" appears on the other side – we'll need YOUR help to make this happen! Some details:

Randolph is the only city in Massachusetts that qualified for Vietnamese-language ballots. Other municipalities do qualify for Spanish and other languages, but only Randolph qualified for Vietnamese-language ballots. Randolph can be proud of serving our Vietnamese-speaking neighbors' election needs well, and now we should work towards serving our Haitian Creole-speaking neighbors too!

The federal legislation that specifies that list of languages is Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, which targets "language minorities [who] have been effectively excluded from participation in the electoral process." Haitian Creole-speakers have not been "effectively excluded," according to our federal government, so there's no requirement to print Haitian Creole ballots even though Randolph has well over 5% of Haitian Creole speakers.

Because printing Randolph's ballots in Vietnamese is a federal requirement, the Secretary of State's office pays for translating and printing our ballots. They'll do the same for Haitian Creole, for state and federal elections, but not for municipal elections. That means printing the November 2025 municipal ballots are up to the Town of Randolph to fund, but all the other ballots in 2024 through 2025 are paid for by state funds.

The Town of Randolph also has to pay an election worker at each polling place who can assist with the Haitian Creole ballots (i.e. a translator). That same rule applies to our Vietnamese ballots, and Randolph hired Vietnamese-speaking election workers in four polling places in November 2022. Because Randolph has more Haitian Creole speakers than Vietnamese speakers, it will likely be easier to find election workers in that language. Si w pale kreyòl ayisyen, ou ka sèvi kòm volontè!

Randolph is one of 5 municipalities in Massachusetts with a significant Haitian Creole community. The other 4 are Medford, Somerville, Brockton, and Boston. So we contacted all 4 of those City Councils, to see if they would pass a similar Home Rule Petition. Getting several municipalities to ask for the same Home Rule Petition makes the state legislature much more likely to pass the legislation quickly. If you have friends or family in those other 4 cities, ask them to bring this issue to their City Council!

Once the Home Rule petitions get to the legislature, we rely on our State Reps and State Senators to bring the bill to a vote, and to get their colleagues to vote Yes. Contacting your state legislator helps a lot – just to let them know that you'd like them to pass this legislation – it's called "Bill HD.4474". Former State Senate candidate Kathleen Crogan-Camara will lead the effort to contact our state legislators – contact info on other side!

Town Councilors Jesse Gordon and Katrina Huff-Larmond introduced this Home Rule Petition to the Randolph Town Council, and are committed to seeing it through to implementation.

Sincerely,

Jesse Gordon, (617) 320-6989, jesse@JesseGordon.com



Town Councilor Ken Clifton and Jesse Gordon at Randolph Haitian Pride Celebration, 6/18/2019
Jesse holds the "Honorary Haitian" certificate he received that day -- bòn fèt drapo!



JesseGordon.com/creole.htm



Enfòmasyon an kreyòl ayisyen

Order 2023-025

Introduced By: Councillor Katrina Huff-Larmond
and Councillor Jesse Gordon
May 22, 2023



**Authorization By The Randolph Town Council
To Petition The General Court To Enact Special Legislation Regarding
The Preparation of Certain Bilingual Ballots
In The City Known As The Town Of Randolph**

The Randolph Town Council hereby authorizes a petition to the General Court to enact special legislation regarding the preparation of bilingual ballots in English and Haitian Creole in the city known as the Town of Randolph, said special legislation to be in a form that is substantially as presented below, and authorizes the Town Manager to take any action necessary in connection with the submission of said petition, and further authorizes the General Court to make clerical or editorial changes of form to the proposed special legislation:

**AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE PREPARATION OF BILINGUAL BALLOTS
IN ENGLISH AND HAITIAN CREOLE IN THE CITY KNOWN AS THE TOWN OF
RANDOLPH.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. As used in this act, the following words shall have the following meanings unless the context clearly requires otherwise:-

“State election”, an election at which a national, state or county officer or a regional district school committee member elected districtwide is to be chosen by the voters, whether for a full term or for the filling of a vacancy.

SECTION 2. Notwithstanding section 40 of chapter 54 of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, in state elections ballots shall be provided to voters in the town in English and Haitian Creole, in addition to being provided in any other languages required by law. The state secretary shall prepare such ballots in English and Haitian Creole and in any other languages required by law.

SECTION 3. Notwithstanding any general or special law or the charter of the town to the contrary, in all town preliminary and final elections ballots shall be provided to voters in the town in English and Haitian Creole, in addition to being provided in any other languages required by law. The board shall prepare such ballots in English and Haitian Creole and in any other languages required by law.

Contacts in State House:	(ask them to vote for our Home Rule Petition!)
State Rep. Bill Driscoll	(617) 722-2020 William.Driscoll@MAHouse.gov
State Rep. Bruce Ayers	(617) 722-2220 Bruce.Ayers@MAHouse.gov
State Senator Walter Timilty	(617) 722-1643 Walter.Timilty@MASenate.gov
State Senator Michael Brady	(617) 722-1200 Michael.Brady@MASenate.gov

Cities with large Haitian-Creole population: (ask them to join us like petition above!)	
Somerville City Council	(617) 666-3311 citycouncil@somervillema.gov
Brockton City Council	(508) 897-1314 snicastro@cobma.us
Boston City Council	(617) 635-3040 https://www.boston.gov/departments/city-council
Medford City Council	(781) 393-2425 ccmembers@medford-ma.gov

Thank you from Town Councilor Jesse Gordon (617) 320-6989