



State of Wisconsin
2025 - 2026 LEGISLATURE

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2025 SENATE BILL 357

June 27, 2025 - Introduced by Senators JACQUE and NASS, cosponsored by Representatives MURPHY, O'CONNOR, GUNDRUM, MAXEY, KREIBICH, BROOKS and BEHNKE. Referred to Committee on Government Operations, Labor and Economic Development.

1 **AN ACT** *to amend* 885.37 (1), 885.37 (3) (b) and 885.38 (3) (a) (intro.); *to create*
2 1.101 of the statutes; **relating to:** establishing English as the official state
3 language, use of artificial intelligence or other machine-assisted translation
4 tools in lieu of appointing English language interpreters, and use of English
5 for governmental oral and written communication and for nongovernmental
6 purposes.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

Currently, Wisconsin has no official language. This bill provides that the official language of this state is English. The bill also allows any state or local governmental entity to provide a person with access to artificial intelligence or other machine-assisted translation tools in lieu of appointing an English language interpreter if the entity is authorized or required by law to appoint an interpreter for the person.

Additionally, the bill provides that, unless otherwise specifically required by law, all oral and written communication by all state and local governmental entities must be in the English language, except that such communication may be in another language when appropriate to the circumstances of an individual case, the

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implementation of a program in a specific instance, or the discharge of a responsibility in a particular situation. The bill also permits state and local government officers and employees to use a language other than English in oral or written communication whenever necessary for one or more of eight specified purposes.

Finally, the bill precludes any state or local governmental entity from prohibiting any person from becoming proficient in any language or restricting the oral or written use of any language for a nongovernmental purpose.

For further information see the state and local fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. 1.101 of the statutes is created to read:

1.101 Official state language; use of English in government operations.

(1) DEFINITIONS. In this section:

(a) “Local governmental unit” means a political subdivision, a special purpose district, an agency or corporation of a political subdivision or special purpose district, a school district, or a combination or subunit of any of the foregoing, in this state.

(b) “Political subdivision” means a city, village, town, or county.

(c) “State agency” means an association, authority, board, department, commission, independent agency, institution, office, society, or other body in state government created or authorized to be created by the constitution or any law.

(2) ESTABLISHING ENGLISH AS THE OFFICIAL STATE LANGUAGE. The official language of this state is English.

(3) ALTERNATIVES TO APPOINTMENT OF INTERPRETERS. If a state agency or local governmental unit is authorized or required by law to appoint an English

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1 language interpreter for a person, the state agency or local governmental unit may,
2 in lieu of appointing an interpreter, provide the person with access to artificial
3 intelligence or other machine-assisted translation tools.

4 **(4) USE OF ENGLISH IN GOVERNMENTAL ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.**

5 (a) Unless otherwise specifically authorized or required by law and except as
6 authorized in par. (b), all oral and written communication by all state agencies and
7 local governmental units shall be in the English language, except that such
8 communication may be in another language when appropriate to the circumstances
9 of an individual case, the implementation of a program in a specific instance, or the
10 discharge of a responsibility in a particular situation.

11 (b) An officer or employee of a state agency or local governmental unit may use
12 a language other than English in oral or written communication whenever
13 necessary for any of the following purposes:

- 14 1. To protect the health, safety, or liberty of any citizen.
- 15 2. To teach or study another language.
- 16 3. To protect the rights of a criminal defendant or victim of a crime.
- 17 4. To promote trade, tourism, or commerce.
- 18 5. To facilitate activities relating to the compilation of any census.
- 19 6. To comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
20 under 20 USC 1400 et seq.
- 21 7. To use a proper name, term of art, or phrase from a language other than
22 English.

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1 8. To comply with the constitution and laws of the United States or the
2 constitution of this state.

3 (5) USE OF LANGUAGES. No state agency or local governmental unit may
4 prohibit any person from becoming proficient in any language or restrict the oral or
5 written use of any language for a nongovernmental purpose.

6 **SECTION 2.** 885.37 (1) of the statutes is amended to read:

7 885.37 (1) If a municipal court has notice that a person who is a juvenile or
8 parent subject to ch. 938, or who is a witness in a proceeding under ch. 938, has a
9 language difficulty because of the inability to speak or understand English, has a
10 hearing impairment, is unable to speak, or has a speech defect, the court shall make
11 a factual determination of whether the language difficulty or the hearing or
12 speaking impairment is sufficient to prevent the ~~individual~~ person from
13 communicating with ~~his or her~~ the person's attorney, reasonably understanding the
14 English testimony, or reasonably being understood in English. If the court
15 determines that an interpreter is necessary, the court shall advise the person that
16 ~~he or she,~~ except as provided in s. 1.101 (3), the person has a right to a qualified
17 interpreter and that, if the person cannot afford one, an interpreter will be provided
18 for ~~him or her~~ the person at the public's expense. Any waiver of the right to an
19 interpreter is effective only if made voluntarily in person, in open court, and on the
20 record.

21 **SECTION 3.** 885.37 (3) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

22 885.37 (3) (b) In any administrative contested case proceeding before a state,
23 county, or municipal agency, if the agency conducting the proceeding has notice that
24 a party to the proceeding has a language difficulty because of the inability to speak

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1 or understand English, has a hearing impairment, is unable to speak, or has a
2 speech defect, the agency shall make a factual determination of whether the
3 language difficulty or hearing or speaking impairment is sufficient to prevent the
4 party from communicating with others, reasonably understanding the English
5 testimony, or reasonably being understood in English. If the agency determines
6 that an interpreter is necessary, the agency shall advise the party that ~~he or she~~,
7 except as provided in s. 1.101 (3), the party has a right to a qualified interpreter.
8 After considering the party's ability to pay and the other needs of the party, the
9 agency may provide for an interpreter for the party at the public's expense. Any
10 waiver of the right to an interpreter is effective only if made at the administrative
11 contested case proceeding.

12 **SECTION 4.** 885.38 (3) (a) (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

13 885.38 **(3)** (a) (intro.) If ~~the~~ a court determines that ~~the~~ a person has limited
14 English proficiency and that an interpreter is necessary, the court shall advise the
15 person that ~~he or she~~, except as provided in s. 1.101 (3), the person has the right to
16 a qualified interpreter at the public's expense if the person is ~~one~~ any of the
17 following:

18 (END)