

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SJR 8201

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As of January 27, 1997

**Brief Description:** Adopting English as Washington's official language.

**Sponsors:** Senators Benton and Zarelli.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Education: 2/4/97.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**Staff:** Aldo Melchiori (786-7439)

**Background:** At least 23 states have some legislation making English their official state language. In addition, the United States Congress continues to consider the issue. The exact language in the various states' legislation ranges from simply declaring English the official language of the state (i.e., Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Arkansas, Indiana, Mississippi) to more restrictive language requiring that all political subdivisions of this State shall act in English and no other language— (i.e., Arizona). The Arizona amendment to its state constitution has been challenged in state and federal courts. It is presently before the U.S. Supreme Court.

To amend the Washington Constitution, an amendment must be passed by a two-thirds majority of both houses of the Legislature and approved by a majority of qualified voters at the next general election.

**Summary of Bill:** An amendment of the Washington State Constitution is proposed.

English is named the official language of the state of Washington. The Legislature enforces the article by appropriate legislation. Laws which diminish or ignore the English language or the role it has played as the common language of the state are not allowed. The Legislature and state officials must take all steps necessary to preserve, protect, strengthen, and perpetuate English as the common language of the state. Residents or persons doing business in the state may sue the state to enforce the use of English as the language of the state.

The Secretary of State is directed to publish notice of the constitutional amendment during the four weeks preceding the election in every legal newspaper in the state.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 24, 1997.