
HOUSE BILL 2209

State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 1st Special Session

By Representative Klippert

1 AN ACT Relating to designating English as the official language
2 of the state; adding new sections to chapter 1.20 RCW; and creating a
3 new section.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** INTENT. The legislature finds that thirty-
6 two of the United States of America have designated English as the
7 official language. Throughout history the common thread binding
8 individuals of differing backgrounds has been the English language.
9 Command of the English language is necessary to participate in and
10 take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by American life.
11 Absent a rudimentary command of the English language, citizens are
12 unable to make their voices heard by the legislative process,
13 effectively exercise their right to vote, or fully understand the
14 rights afforded them by the United States and Washington
15 Constitutions.

16 The legislature further recognizes that printing government
17 documents in multiple languages is costly and can increase liability
18 of government agencies in situations where a translation
19 inadvertently misconstrues the original document. State agencies
20 spend millions of dollars on translation services, and this act will
21 reduce some of those costs.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 1.20 RCW
2 to read as follows:

3 This act may be known and cited as the Washington state English
4 language empowerment act.

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 1.20 RCW
6 to read as follows:

7 (1) The English language is the official language of the state.

8 (2) All official business of this state must be conducted in
9 English. All official documents, rules, orders, and publications must
10 be printed in English and all official programs, meetings,
11 transactions, and actions conducted by or on behalf of the state and
12 all its political subdivisions must be in English.

13 (3) Other languages may be used by government officials, and in
14 official documents, whenever necessary to:

15 (a) Protect the health, safety, or liberty of any citizen;

16 (b) Teach or study other languages;

17 (c) Protect the rights of criminal defendants or victims of
18 crime;

19 (d) Promote trade, tourism, or commerce;

20 (e) Facilitate activities pertaining to the compilation of any
21 census;

22 (f) Comply with the federal individuals with disabilities
23 education act;

24 (g) Use proper names, terms of art, or phrases from languages
25 other than English; or

26 (h) Comply with the Constitution and laws of the United States of
27 America or the Constitution of the state of Washington.

28 Except in exigent circumstances, when an official government
29 document is translated into any language other than English under
30 this section, an English translation must also be provided in the
31 same document, appearing in such a manner as to afford the reader the
32 opportunity to observe the English translation of all phrases used.

33 (4) This section may not be construed to:

34 (a) Diminish the usage of, prevent the study or development of,
35 or discourage the use of, any native American language in any context
36 or for any purpose;

37 (b) Prohibit an elected official from speaking to any person in a
38 language other than English while campaigning or providing

1 constituent services; although such officials are encouraged to use
2 English as much as possible to promote fluency in English;

3 (c) Disparage any language or discourage any person from learning
4 or using any language; or

5 (d) Prohibit informal and nonbinding translations or
6 communications among or between representatives of government and
7 other persons if the activity does not affect or impair supervision,
8 management, conduct, or execution of official actions and if the
9 representatives of government make clear that these translations or
10 communications are unofficial and not binding on the state or any
11 political subdivision of the state.

12 (5) As used in this section, "official" means any government
13 action or document that binds the government, is required by law, or
14 is authorized by law.

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** If any provision of this act or its
16 application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the
17 remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other
18 persons or circumstances is not affected.

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