



English-Only Legislation Is Unnecessary, Unconstitutional, and Unsafe

Is Unnecessary.

- Proponents of English-only legislation claim they seek to unite all Americans. But the pillars of our strength are democracy, freedom, and equality, and not linguistic or ethnic homogeneity.
- The English language is not under attack in the United States. On the contrary, statistics indicate that most Americans speak English. Further, most immigrants recognize they need to learn English to thrive.
- Census data shows that 98% of Hispanics think it is “essential” that their children learn English. Unfortunately, sufficient educational resources are not available, and English-only laws do not increase resources to promote English learning. We urge Congress to make English language education widely available and affordable for all, rather than passing divisive legislation that does not help promote English language learning.
- An “English only” requirement unfairly penalizes lawful, documented immigrants and visitors who have newly arrived in the United States and may not as yet had time to perfect their language skills.

Violates the Rights of Americans.

- English-only laws are inconsistent with the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. For example, laws that have the effect of eliminating courtroom translation severely jeopardize the ability of people on trial to follow and comprehend the proceedings. These laws could also interfere with the right to vote by banning language assistance or with a child’s right to an education by restricting bilingual instruction, and with the right of workers to be free of discrimination in workplaces where employers have banned all non-English conversations.
- English-only legislation also denies U.S. citizens with limited English proficiency some of their basic rights. For example, naturalization for U.S. citizenship does not require English literacy for people over 50, or people who have been in the U.S. for over 20 years. Therefore, an English-only law that effectively bans language assistance for voting would effectively deny voting rights to many elderly immigrant citizens because they would be unable to read ballots in their own languages.

- Services affected by English-only laws include health, education, social welfare services, job training, translation assistance to crime victims and witnesses in court, voting assistance, drivers' licensing exams, and AIDS prevention education.
- English-only laws have a chilling effect on government employees who fear that providing services in a language other than English—even when that is the law—might be illegal.
- An “English only” standard prevents legal residents and United States citizens from obtaining important information from their government, and prevents such persons from effectively communicating with or expressing grievances to their elected officials, impinging on First Amendment and Equal Protection rights. The right to receive ideas is a necessary predicate to an individual's rights of speech, press and political freedom.
- The initiative limits the free speech rights of city officials and city employees. By requiring all communication to be in English employees and elected officials will be prohibited from communication and receiving information non-English speaking residents, who make up a significant portion of the community and contribute greatly to the community's social and economic fabric.

Is Dangerous.

- The ability to speak a foreign languages could be critical to ensuring the safety and security of Nashvillians who need to share information with law enforcement or report crimes. Prohibiting communication in languages other than English will shut out individuals who have important information to share with government officials. Metro government should encourage, not discourage, communication between its residents and government employees.
- This ordinance includes vague language that could leave city officials and employees wondering whether they may use a language other than English when speaking about pressing issues with constituents and stakeholders who do not speak English. This would cover a wide variety of subjects, everything from a report of a crime, a dangerous animal roaming the streets, a fallen electrical line that could cause injury, or a broken streetlight that could cause an accident to uncollected garbage or gang activity.