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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 1625 Session of  
2021

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INTRODUCED BY DAVANZO, BERNSTINE, HAMM, KAUFFMAN, METCALFE,  
MILLARD, ROWE, SILVIS AND STAMBAUGH, JUNE 14, 2021

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, JUNE 14, 2021

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AN ACT

1 Providing for the English language as the official language of  
2 the Commonwealth; and imposing a certain restriction on use  
3 of appropriated funds.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Short title.

7 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Official  
8 Language Act.

9 Section 2. Legislative findings.

10 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

11 (1) The English language is the common and traditional  
12 language of the United States and this Commonwealth.

13 (2) The use of a common language removes barriers of  
14 misunderstanding and helps to unify the citizens of the  
15 United States and this Commonwealth.

16 (3) A compelling State interest exists in promoting,  
17 preserving and strengthening the use of the English language.

18 (4) The Commonwealth should promote proficiency in the

1 English language to enable the full economic and civic  
2 participation of all its citizens.

3 (5) A knowledge of the common language is essential to  
4 full exercise of constitutional freedoms, informed and  
5 knowledgeable empowerment as voters, citizen checks against  
6 government abuses and individual prosperity and independence.

7 (6) The English language has been our strongest bond to  
8 one another as fellow citizens and has contributed  
9 substantially to national unity and societal cohesiveness.

10 (7) English has been this nation's language by custom  
11 only and warrants special legal protection.

12 (8) Government has a fiduciary responsibility to the  
13 citizenry to ensure that it operates as efficiently as  
14 possible, and the growth of multiple language bureaucracies  
15 and printing represents an abrogation of this fiduciary  
16 responsibility.

17 (9) The Commonwealth and its municipalities and the  
18 Federal Government also have a responsibility to ensure that  
19 citizens have opportunities to learn English.

20 (10) Among the powers reserved to this Commonwealth is  
21 the power to establish the English language as this  
22 Commonwealth's official language and to promote the use of  
23 the English language within this Commonwealth.

24 Section 3. Purpose.

25 (a) Unifying role.--It is the purpose of this act to  
26 preserve, protect and strengthen the unifying role of English as  
27 the official language of this Commonwealth.

28 (b) Rights preserved.--This act shall not be construed in  
29 any way to infringe on the rights of citizens, who have every  
30 right to choose their own primary language, in the use of

1 language for private conduct, nor shall this act be used to  
2 dictate language policies for the operation and administration  
3 of organizations or businesses in the unregulated private  
4 sector.

5 Section 4. Definitions.

6 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall  
7 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
8 context clearly indicates otherwise:

9 "Official acts of government." Any of the following:

10 (1) Actions of the Commonwealth and of its political  
11 subdivisions that carry the full weight and authority of law.

12 (2) Any order, regulation, rule, statement of policy,  
13 adjudication, certificate, license, permit, notice,  
14 instrument or official document issued, prescribed or  
15 promulgated by or under the authority of the Commonwealth and  
16 of its political subdivisions.

17 Section 5. Designation of language of official acts.

18 English is hereby recognized as the official language of the  
19 Commonwealth and shall also be designated as the language of  
20 official acts of government.

21 Section 6. Policies.

22 The Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall make no  
23 policies expressing a preference for any language other than  
24 English or diminishing or ignoring the unifying role of English  
25 as designated in this act, subject to the limitations in section  
26 8.

27 Section 7. Enforcement.

28 Elected and appointed officers of the Commonwealth and its  
29 political subdivisions shall take all reasonable steps to ensure  
30 that the role of English as the official language is preserved

1 and enhanced.

2 Section 8. Limitations.

3 The provisions of this act shall not apply to the following:

4 (1) When Federal law imposes contrary provisions.

5 (2) When the public safety, health or justice requires  
6 the use of other languages.

7 (3) Instruction in foreign language courses.

8 (4) Instruction designed to aid students with limited  
9 English proficiency in their transition and integration into  
10 the education system.

11 (5) The promotion of international commerce or tourism.

12 (6) When using terms of art or phrases from languages  
13 other than English.

14 (7) The preservation or use of Native Alaskan or Native  
15 American languages as defined in the Native American  
16 Languages Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-477) or the Individuals  
17 with Disabilities Education Act (Public Law 91-230, 20 U.S.C.  
18 § 1400 et seq.).

19 (8) The creation or promotion of a State motto or State  
20 agency motto, the inscription of public monuments or the  
21 performance of other acts involving the customary use of  
22 languages other than English.

23 (9) The protection of the rights of criminal defendants  
24 or victims of crime.

25 (10) Unofficial communications, through any medium,  
26 between a person and a member of the General Assembly or any  
27 officer or agent of the Commonwealth and its political  
28 subdivisions, as long as official acts of government are  
29 performed in English.

30 Section 9. Restrictions on use of appropriated funds.

1       No appropriation of the General Assembly may be expended to  
2 promote the use of or demonstrate a preference for any language  
3 other than the official language, subject to the limitations in  
4 section 8.

5 Section 10. Effective date.

6       This act shall take effect in 90 days.