

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5865

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As of February 17, 1997

**Title:** An act relating to English as the official language of Washington.

**Brief Description:** Making English the official language of Washington.

**Sponsors:** Senators Benton, Zarelli, Schow, Roach and Hochstatter.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Education: 2/20/97.

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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.

**Summary of Bill:** The Legislature finds that English is the common language of the people of the United States and the state of Washington. The Legislature intends to preserve, protect, strengthen, and perpetuate the English language and takes all steps necessary to do so.

Except as required by federal law, no government employee may provide documents, written information, literature, or any other written text in any language other than English.

Exceptions are made for emergency personnel in a situation regarding health and safety and for court appointed interpreters for legal proceedings, civil or criminal.

A resident or person doing business in the state has standing to sue the state in a court of record of the state of Washington. The Legislature may limit the time and manner of lawsuits.

If a section of the act is held invalid, the remainder of the provision is not affected.

The Secretary of State submits the act to a vote of the people at the next general election in accordance with the state Constitution.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.