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HOUSE BILL 1769

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State of Washington

62nd Legislature

2011 Regular Session

By Representative McCune

Read first time 02/01/11. Referred to Committee on State Government & Tribal Affairs.

1 AN ACT Relating to designating English as the official language of  
2 the state; adding new sections to chapter 1.20 RCW; and creating a new  
3 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 one 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 take  
10 full advantage of the opportunities afforded by American life. Absent  
11 a rudimentary command of the English language, citizens are unable to  
12 make their voices heard by the legislative process, effectively  
13 exercise their right to vote, or fully understand the rights afforded  
14 them by the United States and Washington Constitutions.

15 The legislature further recognizes that printing government  
16 documents in multiple languages is costly and can increase liability of  
17 government agencies in situations where a translation inadvertently  
18 misconstrues the original document. State agencies spend millions of

1 dollars on translation services, and this act will reduce some of those  
2 costs.

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

5 This act may be known and cited as the Washington state English  
6 language empowerment act.

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

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

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

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

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

18 (b) Teach or study other languages;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

35 (a) Diminish the usage of, prevent the study or development of, or

1 discourage the use of, any native American language in any contest or  
2 for any purpose;

3 (b) Prohibit an elected official from speaking to any person in a  
4 language other than English while campaigning or providing constituent  
5 services; although such officials are encouraged to use English as much  
6 as possible to promote fluency in English;

7 (c) Disparage any language or discourage any person from learning  
8 or using any language; or

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

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

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

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