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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the House of Representatives

FROM: Representative Angel Cruz

DATE: February 15, 2012

SUBJECT: Resolution Urging Congress to Reform the Immigration and Nationality Act

In the near future, I plan to introduce a resolution urging Congress to reform the McCarran-Walter Act (P.L. 82-414) otherwise known as the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) by eliminating the English proficiency test and allowing administration of the civics test in the native language of the applicant.

As you may know, The Naturalization Test, a requirement to become a naturalized U.S. citizen, is composed of two portions, the English test and the civics test. The English proficiency test has three components: reading, writing, and speaking. The civics test is an oral exam and applicants must correctly answer 6 out of 10 questions from a pool of 100 questions.

Presently, applicants are exempt from the English test if the applicant is either: (1) age 50 or older and has lived as a permanent U.S. resident for 20 years, or (2) age 55 or older and has lived as a permanent U.S. resident for 15 years. In addition, the applicant is afforded the opportunity to complete the civics test in their native language.

America was founded and built on the backs of hardworking immigrants who brought their language and customs along with their families and belongings to the Land of Opportunity. The present exemption reveals that English proficiency is unnecessary for citizenship. In addition, such a practice is counterintuitive to the American philosophy of fairness, equality, and opportunity. I believe the current Naturalization Test is based on unfounded fears and uncertainties, and prevents many eligible individuals from becoming citizens. We need to allow every individual the opportunity to become a citizen, gain further education, and learn English at one's own pace.

If you are interested in co-sponsoring this resolution, please contact Christina Consylman at 717-787-1407 or cconsylm@pahouse.net.