

**PREPARED TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW SHUMAN BEFORE THE
PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE**

September 21, 2015

Mr. Chairman, ranking member Cohen, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you.

My name is Matthew Shuman, and I manage the Government Relations team for U.S. English, Inc., a grassroots organization based in Washington, DC. U.S. English was founded in 1983 by Senator S.I. Hayakawa, who himself was an immigrant. The current Chairman of U.S. English, Mauro Mujica, is also an immigrant, who speaks several languages. We have nearly 2 million members nationwide, including over 60,000 here in Pennsylvania.

As you know, because of the law and practical obstacles, states can't do a lot when it comes to immigration policy. But states are on the front lines when it comes to what we might call "Immigrant Policy." That is, how do we treat immigrants when they come here? How do we make sure immigrants assimilate and are a net benefit to their new country?

Two facts should guide our thinking here: **First**, It is more important than ever for immigrants to learn English. **Second**, making English the official language is a policy that makes it much more likely that immigrants will learn English.

English is the single most important factor in an immigrant becoming an American. Since 1906, some capacity to speak English has been a formal legal requirement for naturalization. But before the swearing in ceremony, there's an informal process by which an immigrant comes to subjectively see him or herself as an American. The Pew Charitable trusts did a study several years ago that found that immigrants who speak English at home are 17 times more likely to self-identify as "American" than those who don't speak English.

An immigrant who can't speak English is not only ineligible for citizenship, but can't really engage with his or her fellow citizens. Those immigrants will tend to think of themselves as expatriates, not as Americans. When we have been at our best as a country, we have seen immigrants, and immigrants have seen themselves, as Americans in training.

100 years ago, when most people lived their whole lives within a 50 mile radius of where they grew up, this might not have been a problem. But now, in a globalized information age economy, we need to be able to talk to one another.

That's why there's a huge income gap between those who speak English and those who don't. According to the U.S. Census, immigrants who learn English earn about 2.5 times more per capita than those who don't. In fact, the per capita income of non-English speaking immigrants is virtually identical to that of students who drop out of high school.

You care about the Pennsylvania high school dropout rate because you know that improving it improves the life prospects of citizens and saves taxpayer dollars by making people net contributors to the economy. You should care about English learning for the same reason.

When we talk about the “costs” surrounding this issue, we should not just look narrowly at the costs of a few government documents. The costs of *not* having English as the official language are all the costs associated with a citizenry that can’t speak English. According to the census, there are more than 465,000 residents of Pennsylvania who can’t speak English. Improve their incomes, raise them above the poverty line, and you save much more than the costs of a few documents.

So how do we do that? Well, thirty-one of your sister states have passed a law to make English the official language of their state. Three professors from New Mexico published a study in the academic journal “Applied Economics,” and they found that immigrants in Official English states make more of an effort to learn English than those who reside in a state without Official English.

Why do these laws work? Well, there are many areas in life where there’s a gap between what we know is the “right thing to do” and our actual behavior. I know I should eat healthier, but if I pass Troegs Brewery today, I won’t be able to resist myself. We know we should exercise more, but life gets in the way. Immigrants know they should learn English, but life gets in the way.

That same Pew Charitable Trusts study I referenced earlier noted that if immigrants don’t start on the road to learning English within their first five years in the country, they will generally not learn English. It’s early or never. Making English the official language puts every government agency on notice that their posture toward immigrants is one of promoting assimilation. And it puts immigrants on notice that English is not just a nice thing to get, like earning an advanced degree. It’s a civic obligation to their new country.

I’d like to quickly address some of the objections to this legislation that some of you may have:

First, this legislation is not going to deprive anyone of access to government. According to the Census, there are 12 languages in Pennsylvania spoken by more than 20,000 people. For most of those language groups—whether German or Vietnamese—English is *already* the de facto official language. State agencies don’t have German translators and documents standing by. When they go to government offices, they are getting by just fine.

Second, some opponents are appealing to your fear of the unknown. What if immigrants or foreign companies find Pennsylvania less hospitable as a result of this legislation? But this isn’t really an unknown: there are 31 sister states that have passed Official English laws. If there were a single documented case of these bad predictions happening, don’t you think opponents would cite a real world example?

Third, it’s very much worth noting that this is not an “English-Only” bill; in fact, U.S. English will never advocate for that. We certainly encourage people to speak more than

one language, just like the Chairman of U.S. English. Speaking other languages assists in making individuals more cultured, trains the mind and improves a person's employment ability.

Finally, the most serious charge is also the most frivolous: opponents claim that this law will cause discrimination. If they mean that a failure to run government agencies in all foreign languages on demand amounts to discrimination, they should be campaigning for all agencies to vastly increase their translation budgets. But they are not, so they can't seriously mean that. They must mean that these laws create a general climate of discrimination.

But do they? Well, a Rasmussen poll conducted just last year determined that 83% of Americans support English being our official language. Let me say that again: 83% of Americans support English being our official language. I highly doubt that 83% of Americans support discriminatory legislation.

The most important work you can do for immigrants in this state is to pass a law that will give immigrants a gentle nudge to learn English. Immigrants support this law. Your constituents support this law. And it puts the Pennsylvania government behind the notion that immigrants should learn English, and that we should help them.

I will end with a famous quote on this topic, from none other than Senator S.I. Hayakawa, a well-known and respected linguist. He said, "English, our common language, binds our diverse people." And we undoubtedly and firmly believe that to be true.

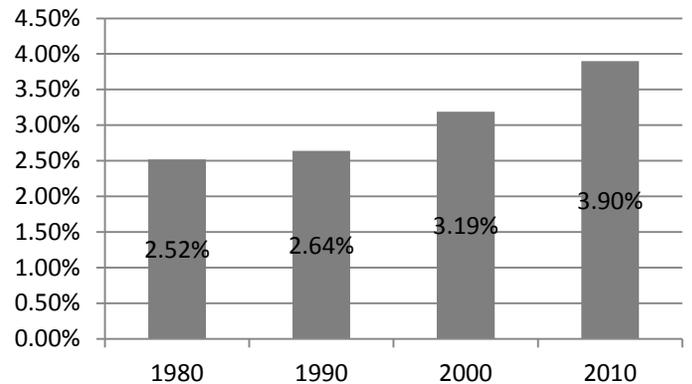
Mr. Chairman, members of this critical committee, I thank you for granting me the opportunity to speak in favor of HB 1506. We would sincerely like to thank Representative Ryan Warner for introducing this common sense legislation. I am looking forward to answering any questions you may have. Thank you!

Pennsylvania

Capital: Harrisburg
 2010 Population: 12,709,630
 Joined Union: Dec. 12, 1787

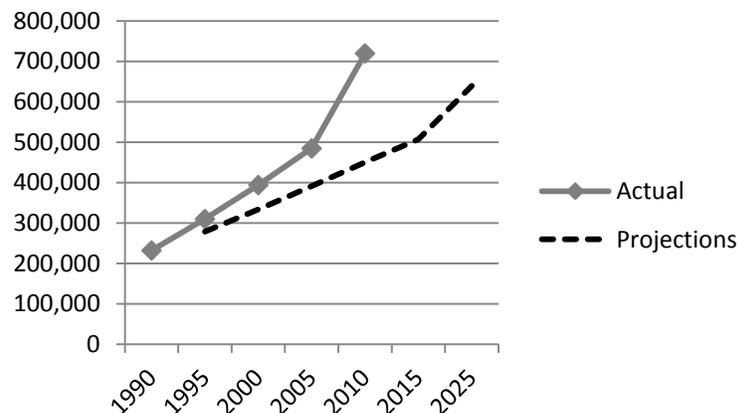
Limited English Proficiency, 1980-2010

Pennsylvania's limited English proficient (LEP) population grew steadily from 1980 to 2010, but due to the rapid increase in LEP rates nationwide, the Keystone State dropped four spots on the state by state LEP ranking list to 27th. With 280,381 limited English proficient residents in 1980, Pennsylvania grew to house 368,257 LEP residents in 2000 and most recently added nearly 100,000 LEP residents, rising to 465,625 LEP individuals in 2010.



Hispanic Population Growth vs. Projections, 1990-2025

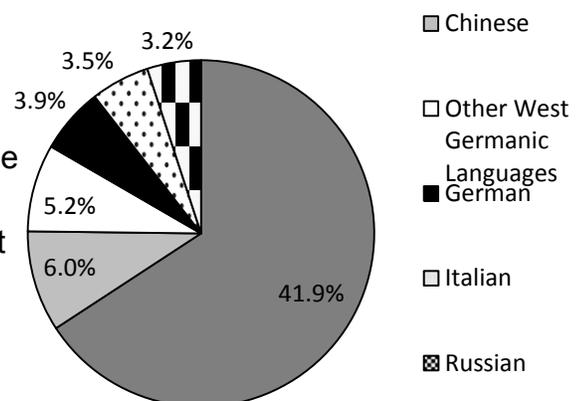
While the Hispanic population in Pennsylvania was close to Census projections in 2000, the growth of this demographic increased dramatically in the years to follow. The number of Hispanic residents in the Keystone State grew greatly between 2005 and 2010, rising from 484,679 in 2005 to a count of 719,660 five years later. This number already surpassed the Census Bureau projection of 639,000 for the year 2025 by more than 100,000.



Prevalence of Foreign Languages

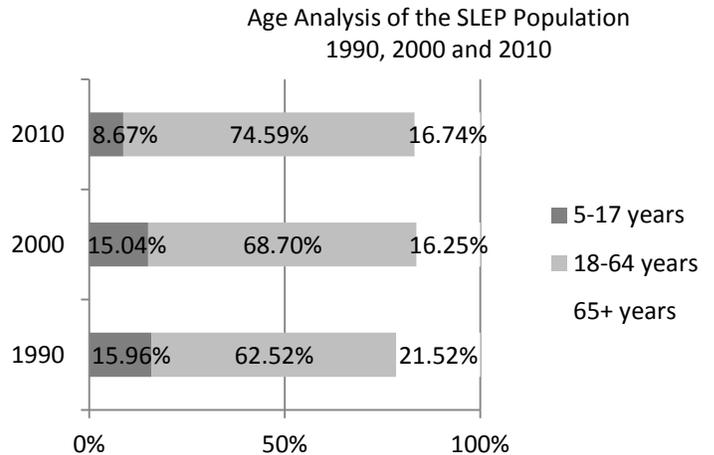
Just over 10% of Pennsylvania residents speak a language other than English at home, accounting for more than 1.2 million individuals. More than 40% (518,056 residents) of these foreign language speakers use Spanish at home. While the other most widely used foreign languages account for a much smaller percentage of residents, a large number of individuals speak them. Chinese is spoken by 73,872 residents, while other West Germanic languages are spoken by 64,607 and German is spoken by 48,344. Italian, accounting for 3.5% of the state's foreign language speakers, is used by 43,214 residents and Russian by 39,767.

Composition of the Foreign Language Speaking Population, 2011



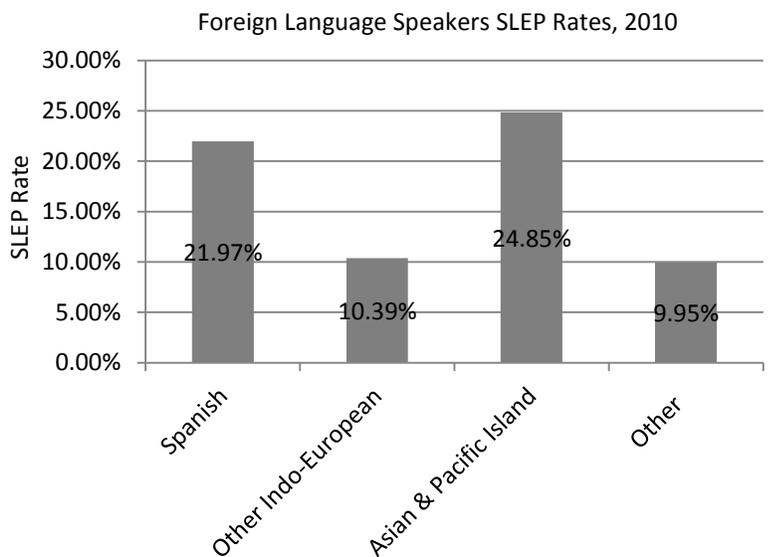
Non-English Proficiency by Age

Pennsylvania's severely limited English proficient (SLEP) population ranks in the top 10 in nearly every age group. With 18,607 children only able to speak English "not well" or "not at all," five to 17 year olds in the Keystone state ranked 9th compared to the same age group in other states. Seniors aged 65 and above just rounded out the nationwide top 10, with the 35,907 SLEP residents placing 10th. With 159,996 SLEP adults aged 18 to 64, this group just misses the top ten, placing Pennsylvania 13th among all 50 states.



Non-English Proficiency by Language Spoken

Nearly 25% of Pennsylvania's speakers of Asian & Pacific Island languages, 50,967 of 205,097 individuals, are considered severely limited English proficient (SLEP), giving this group the third highest SLEP rate among Asian & Pacific Island language speakers nationwide. Despite having the second highest SLEP rate in the state, Spanish speakers placed 37th on national SLEP rankings, while SLEP speakers of other Indo-European languages and 'other' languages ranked 18th and 30th, respectively.



Conclusion

Pennsylvania's limited English proficient population continues to rise, and although it is not yet at alarming levels, steps should be taken now to prevent further linguistic divisions down the road. English learning programs should be targeted at Spanish speakers, who have seen a jump in population in the past several years and account for more than 40% of the state's foreign language speakers. Programs should also be geared towards Pennsylvania's speakers of Asian & Pacific Island languages, who have among the highest rate of limited English proficient speakers nationwide. Furthermore, while the state's percentage of severely limited English proficient children has decreased over the past 30 years, this group still ranks 9th nationwide, showing a clear need for this population to learn English. Unless steps are taken now to encourage these groups to learn English, Pennsylvania will likely soon face the skyrocketing limited English proficient rates that other large states are currently battling.