



Pennsylvania Immigration & Citizenship Coalition

Advocating for immigrants, migrants and refugees

Written Testimony Concerning House Bill 1506 Making English the Official Language of Pennsylvania HB 1506-Hearings Scheduled Sept. 21, 2015

Member organizations include:

AFRICOM

Alianzas de Phoenixville

American Immigration Lawyers Association
(Philadelphia Chapter)

Amnesty International (Philadelphia Chapter)

Aquinas Center

Asian Americans United

Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Office for Pastoral
Care for Refugees and Migrants

Bernardine Franciscan Sisters

Boat People SOS

Casa de la Cultura (Gettysburg)

Catholic Social Services

Ceiba

Center for the Empowerment of Women

Church World Service – Lancaster

Community Legal Services

Equality Pennsylvania

Esperanza Immigration Legal Services

Fight for Driver's Licenses

Friends of Farmworkers

Greater Reading Immigration Project

Health Federation of Philadelphia

HIAS Pennsylvania

Indochinese American Council

Japanese American Citizens League

Keystone Progress

Lutheran Children and Family Service

Nationalities Service Center

New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia

PhilaPOSH

Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project

Philadelphia Corporation for Aging

Pittsburgh Labor Council for Latin American
Advancement

SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania

Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative
Advocacy Network

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the House State Government Committee's September 21, 2015 hearing on House Bill 1506 establishing English as the official language of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC) is a statewide coalition of over 50 member organizations, including community groups, social, health and legal service providers, advocacy organizations, labor unions, faith communities, and hundreds of immigrant community members and allies. Our mission is to advance immigrants' rights and promote immigrants' full integration into society by advocating with a unified voice for greater public understanding and welcoming public policies throughout Pennsylvania.

PICC strongly opposes House Bill 1506, and any other legislation that would make English the official language of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We are surprised that, at a time when Pennsylvania is facing a state budget crisis, some of our legislators are focusing their attention on these purposeless and hateful proposals.

This legislation would serve only to codify a discriminatory anti-immigrant attitude that would be a disgrace to Pennsylvania's legal code. Immigration has always been at the core of our national identity, and today is critical to the continued economic and cultural vibrancy of our Commonwealth. There is little question that English is, for all intents and purposes, the official language of the Commonwealth. Indeed, immigrants understand the importance of learning English and will go to great lengths to learn the language. But enacting legislation that does little more than declare English as Pennsylvania's statutory language, without devoting the resources necessary to help those who wish and need to learn it (for reasons unrelated to any legislative act), serves no redeeming purpose and ignores our heritage.

Census data from 2010 shows significant increases in Pennsylvania's Hispanic and Asian populations. This influx of immigrants has bolstered the population of our once shrinking cities and grown our economy. Asian and Latino owned businesses employed over 53,000 Pennsylvanians in 2002, and immigrants comprised 6.3% of our state's workforce in 2008. Meanwhile, our population aged 65 or over is well above the national average, while our population aged 18 or younger is well below the national average. Pennsylvania needs to continue to attract immigrants to our Commonwealth to keep our population youthful and continue stimulating our economy.

House Bill 1506 would send a clear message to immigrant workers, business owners, and job creators who do not yet speak fluent English that they are not welcome in Pennsylvania. They will choose to raise their families, make their investments, and pay their taxes elsewhere, to the detriment of our economy.

At a time when so many Pennsylvanians are struggling, we need our elected representatives to focus on the issues that matter most to working families. House Bill 1506 will not create one job or educate one child. Instead, it will enshrine intolerance and nativism in the law of our Commonwealth and drive immigrant families away. Pennsylvania should pursue policies that make us more, not less, welcoming to newcomers.

The Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition asks that you oppose House Bill 1506 and any other proposals to make English the official language of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sundrop Carter', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sundrop Carter
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition