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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 2132 Session of  
2014

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INTRODUCED BY METCALFE, BROOKS, EVERETT, C. HARRIS, HEFFLEY,  
HICKERNELL, KAUFFMAN, KNOWLES, KRIEGER, MALONEY, MCGINNIS,  
R. MILLER, SANKEY, SAYLOR, SONNEY, SWANGER AND TALLMAN,  
MARCH 25, 2014

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, MARCH 25, 2014

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AN ACT

1 Providing for the English language as the official language of  
2 the Commonwealth; and imposing a certain restriction on use  
3 of appropriated funds.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
5 hereby enacts as follows:

6 Section 1. Short title.

7 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Official  
8 Language Act.

9 Section 2. Legislative findings.

10 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

11 (1) The people of the United States have brought to this  
12 nation the cultural heritage of many nations.

13 (2) The people of the United States, despite their many  
14 differences, have lived together harmoniously and  
15 productively as citizens of one nation.

16 (3) The traditional and common language of the United  
17 States and of this Commonwealth is English.

1 (4) A knowledge of the common language is essential to  
2 full exercise of constitutional freedoms, informed and  
3 knowledgeable empowerment as voters, citizen checks against  
4 government abuses and individual prosperity and independence.

5 (5) The English language has been our strongest bond to  
6 one another as fellow citizens and has contributed  
7 substantially to national unity and societal cohesiveness.

8 (6) English has been this nation's language by custom  
9 only and warrants special legal protection.

10 (7) Government has a fiduciary responsibility to the  
11 citizenry to ensure that it operates as efficiently as  
12 possible, and the growth of multiple language bureaucracies  
13 and printing represents an abrogation of this fiduciary  
14 responsibility.

15 (8) The Commonwealth and its municipalities and the  
16 Federal Government also have a responsibility to ensure that  
17 citizens have opportunities to learn English.

18 Section 3. Purpose.

19 (a) Unifying role.--It is the purpose of this act to  
20 preserve, protect and strengthen the unifying role of English as  
21 the official language of this Commonwealth.

22 (b) Rights preserved.--This act shall not be construed in  
23 any way to infringe on the rights of citizens, who have every  
24 right to choose their own primary language, in the use of  
25 language for private conduct, nor shall this act be used to  
26 dictate language policies for the operation and administration  
27 of organizations or businesses in the unregulated private  
28 sector.

29 Section 4. Definitions.

30 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall

1 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
2 context clearly indicates otherwise:

3 "Official acts of government." Any of the following:

4 (1) Actions of the Commonwealth and of its political  
5 subdivisions that carry the full weight and authority of law.

6 (2) Official documents recorded and maintained by the  
7 Commonwealth and its political subdivisions for the public  
8 domain, including tax records, professional licenses, deeds,  
9 real estate records, publicly probated wills and other  
10 documents of the court systems and public proceedings of the  
11 governing bodies of the Commonwealth and its political  
12 subdivisions.

13 Section 5. Designation of language of official acts.

14 English is hereby recognized as the official language of the  
15 Commonwealth and shall also be designated as the language of  
16 official acts of government.

17 Section 6. Policies.

18 The Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall make no  
19 policies expressing a preference for any language other than  
20 English or diminishing or ignoring the unifying role of English  
21 as designated in this act, subject to the limitations in section  
22 8.

23 Section 7. Enforcement.

24 Elected and appointed officers of the Commonwealth and its  
25 political subdivisions shall take all reasonable steps to ensure  
26 that the role of English as the official language is preserved  
27 and enhanced.

28 Section 8. Limitations.

29 The provisions of this act shall not apply to the following:

30 (1) When Federal law imposes contrary provisions.

1           (2) When the public safety, health or justice requires  
2 the use of other languages.

3           (3) Instruction in foreign language courses.

4           (4) Instruction designed to aid students with limited  
5 English proficiency in their transition and integration into  
6 the education system.

7           (5) The promotion of international commerce or tourism.

8           (6) When using terms of art or phrases from languages  
9 other than English.

10          (7) The preservation or use of Native Alaskan or Native  
11 American languages as defined in the Native American  
12 Languages Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-477).

13          (8) Unofficial communications, through any medium,  
14 between a person and a member of the General Assembly or any  
15 officer or agent of the Commonwealth and its political  
16 subdivisions, as long as official acts of government are  
17 performed in English.

18 Section 9. Restrictions on use of appropriated funds.

19          No appropriation of the General Assembly may be expended to  
20 promote the use of or demonstrate a preference for any language  
21 other than the official language, subject to the limitations in  
22 section 8.

23 Section 20. Effective date.

24          This act shall take effect in 90 days.