



## **Official English: Claims vs. Realities**

**Claim:** Official English is “English Only”

**Reality:** “English-only” is an inaccurate term for any piece of Official English legislation. U.S. English, Inc. never has and never will advocate for legislation that bans the use of languages other than English within the United States. As enacted, Official English would not affect the diversity of languages spoken in the home, foreign languages learned in classrooms, mottoes, Native American languages and the like. Passage of Official English legislation would not make the United States “English Only,” just as Official English in Nigeria is not “English Only” and Official Spanish in Mexico is not “Spanish Only.”

**Claim:** We do not need Official English legislation. The status of English as the main language of the United States is unchallenged. Throughout our history, immigrants have learned English without it being official, and they are learning it just as fast, if not faster, than previous generations.

**Reality:** Without Official English legislation, state and federal laws have no concerted efforts to guide immigrants toward English proficiency and no driving force to provide English instruction to adults. The policies that do exist are costly, uncoordinated and do little to help immigrants adjust to life in the United States. Official English establishes this missing framework, putting all Americans on the same page—toward English proficiency for all.

**Claim:** Official English laws ban the speaking of any language except English.

**Reality:** Official English applies to the government. Personal communication, private business and all other communication is free to be performed in any language. While the government does play a role in encouraging civic virtue (don’t smoke; save money; read to your children), it does not force any of these ideas onto the private sector.

**Claim:** In this global economy, it is ridiculous for the United States to restrict its population to one language. Instead, we should encourage people to speak as many languages as possible.

**Reality:** We agree! Official English legislation does not restrict the teaching of other languages. Senator S.I. Hayakawa, the founder of U.S. English, was an ardent supporter of learning other languages, and frequently lamented our lack of focus on learning additional languages. Regardless, we must ensure that no matter how many languages an American can speak, one of them must be English.

**Claim:** Official English would violate the First Amendment.

**Reality:** Official English does not take away an individual's right to say what s/he chooses, in what language s/he chooses. What Official English does is state that individuals do not have an inherent right to receive government services in languages other than English.

**Claim:** Making English official is a way to suppress other languages from being spoken and force immigrants to speak English.

**Reality:** Official English is not about language restriction. It's about a general principle that language assistance is not a lifetime entitlement, and the proper role of the government is to encourage the teaching of English, not be a perpetual translator.

**Claim:** Even though Official English itself applies only to government, it would create a "climate of intolerance," giving an excuse to private citizens to discriminate against those who speak other languages.

**Reality:** Thirty-one states have passed Official English laws, and there has not been a single report of subsequent private discrimination as a result of these laws. In addition, to the extent that English increases immigrants' job prospects, Official English makes it likely that job-seeking immigrants will be seen more favorably.

**Claim:** Making English official is a xenophobic measure designed only to attack immigrants and keep them out of the United States.

**Reality:** Many supporters of Official English are immigrants or children of immigrants. In polls, first and second generation Americans demonstrate the same level of support for Official English as do Americans of the third generation and beyond. Immigrants who make the decision to come to the United States and complete the necessary requirements to do so will not be discouraged by an Official English law.

**Claim:** The courts are busy enough as it is. Adding the multiple lawsuits that would result if government workers happen to use another language would be an incredible burden.

**Reality:** Official English is already the law in 31 states. None is currently dealing with an overload of lawsuits due to Official English legislation.