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House Bill 477 Concerns

House Bill 477 would require state agencies to conduct official business in English – although state agencies already do so. Ohio Latino Affairs passed a resolution against the bill for the following reasons: it does not change the status quo; is completely unnecessary; sends the wrong message to businesses, foreign investment, and those learning a foreign language; and because provisions like it have already been demonstrated to unlawfully deny rights and services by those who misinterpret its purpose to those who rightfully should be served.

Negative Economic Effects

- ◆ **The bill could cost the state foreign investment and business opportunities.** National and foreign businesses and investment agencies may interpret the bill to mean Ohio is not ready to compete in a global economy.
 - Multilingualism is becoming an economic imperative. Trade agreements such as NAFTA and GATT formalize the growing trend toward export-driven economies and the need to communicate in the global marketplace.
 - Just two years ago Ohio was in the running for a second major Honda factory while similar legislation was being contemplated. Honda chose not to build that plant in Ohio.
 - The Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives cited economic concerns when stopping a similar measure in the previous General Assembly.

- ◆ **The bill will make Ohio less competitive among other states.** Ohio's workforce will not be as skilled and competitive as other states' that encourage multilingualism.
 - Ohio high school and college students may interpret the bill to mean they do not need to study a foreign language. This will lead to an Ohio workforce that is not diverse in language, with no incentive to pursue those skills.
 - The U.S. Census reported in 2000 that nearly 94% of Ohioans ONLY speak English.
 - Ohio may also lose international students and researchers, who bring dollars, diverse ideas, and international networking opportunities.

- ◆ **Immigrant businesses contribute to the Ohio economy.** The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Ohio includes many entrepreneurs who, despite limited English proficiency, are contributing to Ohio's economy and working toward the improvement of their local communities. The bill could block access to state government, harming these businesses.

- ◆ **The bill has received opposition from labor unions.** Labor unions are an important part of the Ohio economy and are composed of a diverse workforce. In particular, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee and Service Employees International Union, members of the AFL-CIO, oppose the bill.



Vulnerability to Lawsuits

- ◆ **The bill's constitutionality is questionable.** In Iowa, the attorney general's office is reviewing whether federal civil rights laws may override the state's "English-only" law, which is nearly identical to the provisions of Ohio's proposed bill.
 - If the bill is deemed to conflict with federal provisions, state officials say publishing only in English could cause Iowa to lose federal money.
- ◆ **The bill will make state agencies vulnerable to costly lawsuits.** Although the bill provides exceptions to the requirement, states agencies may be unsure about whether their specific needs fall within an exception. If they choose to disseminate information in other languages, individual citizens may question those decisions by suing the state. This could involve the state in costly litigation.
- ◆ **Misinterpretations of the bill will subject the state to lawsuits.** Employers and employees of Ohio state agencies may believe that it is prohibited to speak a foreign language at work, abridging civil rights. This could involve the state in costly litigation.

Civil and Human Rights

- ◆ **The bill threatens to abridge the civil and human rights of lawful residents and American citizens.** State employees who are on the frontline, providing Ohio's agency services may interpret the bill wrongly, denying protections and services to lawful residents and American citizens.
- ◆ **Valuable information will be inaccessible to American citizens and lawful residents.** With the threat of a possible lawsuit, State agencies will likely error on the side of caution and choose not to disseminate valuable information. Other information, which is currently being disseminated by state agencies, will be prohibited.
 - Examples of information likely to be prohibited: information as to the rights of consumers and services, information regarding public utility options, "know your rights" brochures, information provided by the Dept. of Development, Dept. of Commerce or Secretary of State to aid immigrant entrepreneurs who might not understand highly technical language, study aids for driver's license tests, information provided by the Department of Education to non-English speaking parents.



Ineffectiveness

- ◆ **The bill requires non-English speakers to learn English without providing them the resources to do so.** Many non-English speakers who want to learn English do not have the resources. The demand for English classes is much greater than the supply. The focus of the bill should be about English education and helping community organizations serve those who want to learn English.