

**PREPARED TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW SANTOS BEFORE THE OHIO HOUSE
STATE GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
HOUSE BILL 477**

May 1, 2008

Thank you, Chairman Daniels and Committee Members, for the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 477, legislation to ensure that government business in Ohio is done in English.

My name is Matthew Santos, and I am a member of the government relations department for U.S. English, Inc., a grassroots organization based in Washington, D.C. U.S. English was founded in 1983 by former-Senator S.I. Hayakawa, who was himself an immigrant and we have now grown to over 1.8 million members, including over 38,000 in Ohio. Our organization focuses on public policy issues that involve language and national identity, particularly official English laws.

Mr. Chairman, U.S. English is led by an immigrant, Mauro E. Mujica, who is a naturalized citizen from Chile. One third of U.S. English members are either immigrants or the children of immigrants. A Mason-Dixon poll last autumn found that 77 percent of Ohio residents favor a law to make English the official language, and another Zogby poll found support among more than three-in-four immigrants nationwide. In both its motivations and content, this is a pro-immigrant bill.

While there is certainly a need for government to occasionally operate in other languages, that need must be balanced by a legitimate insistence that immigrants are on the road to learning English. That balance is embodied in H.B. 477, which requires that routine government operations be in English.

In a state where residents speak many languages, multilingual government should be the exception, not the rule. You may be surprised to learn that there are 116 different languages spoken in Ohio and over 300 nationwide. Unfortunately, instead of promoting English learning, government agencies around the country increasingly seek to cater to immigrants in as many languages as possible. My boss is a 40 year resident of the United States, but he says that he can walk into virtually any government office and because his name is "Mauro Mujica," the person behind the counter will immediately assume that he needs service in Spanish. I also experience the same treatment because of my last name. This was not the case for immigrants who came to this country 50 or 100 years ago.

But don't just take my word for it. In researching his book "Translation Nation," former Los Angeles Times reporter Hector Tobar traveled throughout the country, and concluded that modern communications technology and legitimate customer service goals have created large areas all around the country where it is entirely possible to live an English free existence. This is a first in American history. Mr. Tobar generally views this as a *positive* development, but his diagnosis of the situation is exactly the same as mine.

promoting the crucial step in that process: learning the English language. H.B. 477 is consistent with this policy goal and with the values of the people of the state, and I respectfully urge this committee to favorably report it.

Thank you Chairman Daniels and Committee Members for allowing me to testify on House Bill 477, I will be happy to answer any questions.