



TRANSPARENT TIMES

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Representative Daryl D. Metcalfe, Chairman

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ENGLISH AS OUR OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

On September 14th, the House State Government Committee held a public hearing on House Bills 361 (Swanger) and 888 (Perry), which would designate English as the official language of the Commonwealth and require official acts of government to be made in English only.

Chairman Metcalfe began the hearing with a moment of silence, in honor of the recent death of Joey Vento. Mr. Vento was an American patriot who made nationwide headlines for a sign posted at his business, Geno's Steaks, that read, "This is AMERICA: WHEN ORDERING 'PLEASE SPEAK ENGLISH.'"

Over 90% of the nations in the world have adopted an official language. Out of the 177 countries who have declared an official language, 54 countries designated English.

Representatives Scott Perry and RoseMarie Swanger both presented testimony on their legislation. Representative Perry noted that "Section 312 of the Immigration and Nationality Act indicates that no person, except as otherwise provided in this title, shall be naturalized as a citizen of the United States upon his own application who cannot demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language."

Representative Swanger stressed that official English legislation does not seek to prohibit individuals from speaking or writing in other languages, but it is designed to highlight the importance of the English language and improve government efficiency.

During the hearing, members of Committee also heard arguments for the passage of these bills from several English advocacy organizations. Suzanne Bibby, Director of Government Relations for ProEnglish, noted in her testimony that, "throughout our nation's history, we have expected new immigrants to assimilate into our common American culture and the most important pillar in the assimilation process is learning English."

Don Soifer, Executive Vice President of the Lexington Institute, highlighted the financial burden bilingual policies have on taxpayers. According to his research, "There are 197,000 people living in Pennsylvania who speak English less than well. Approximately one-fourth of these, 44,000, speak no English at all." He also noted that, "In those areas, like Philadelphia, with higher concentrations of English learners and households living in linguistic isolation, the economic effects would likely impact the entire community and region."

Tim Schultz, Director of Government Relations for U.S. English Inc., also explained some of the financial costs with having a high concentration of non-English speaking citizens. "When we talk about the costs surrounding this issue, we should not just look narrowly at the costs of a few government documents. The costs of not having English as the official language are all costs associated with a citizenry that can't speak English." These costs include more individuals on social welfare programs, the need for translation services and bilingual education in schools.

The House State Government Committee plans to hold an informational meeting within the coming weeks to discuss testimony received at the hearing.

FIGHTING FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

On September 27th, the State Government Committee passed House Bill 1349 out of Committee. If enacted, Representative Tina Pickett's bill will amend the Regulatory Review Act to require state agencies to consider the impact of proposed regulations on small businesses. House Bill 1349 will ultimately lead to job creation, as small businesses comprise nearly half of Pennsylvania's business community.

Small businesses will also be given the ability to request judicial review of a final regulation, if they have been adversely affected by a regulation, to ensure that the agency considered all the potential effects of the regulation on small businesses during the regulatory review process.

Fundamental changes are needed in the regulatory and enforcement culture of state agencies to make them more responsive to small businesses. When proposing regulations to achieve the objectives of state laws, agencies should seek to achieve these goals efficiently and without placing unnecessary burdens on the small business community.

At the meeting, Representative Pickett explained that "Small businesses are greatly frustrated by the lack of consideration they receive, and 44 states already have regulatory flexibility in place." She further noted, "Smaller companies are less likely to have the infrastructure in place to adapt to new regulations the way larger companies would."

Legislation similar to House Bill 1349 received bipartisan support in two previous legislative sessions. During the 2003-04 session, legislation was passed unanimously in the House and the same legislation only received four negative votes in the House during the 2005-06 session. Governor Rendell vetoed the legislation in 2004 and 2006.

House Bill 1349 creates a job-friendly environment without a new government program, spending additional taxpayer dollars or providing bailouts to businesses. The legislation simply requires Pennsylvania to give small business owners "a seat at the table" during the regulatory review process.

CONTACT ME

dmetcalf@pahousegop.com



Cranberry Township

Cranberry Twp. Municipal Building
2525 Rochester Rd., Suite 201
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
Phone: (724) 772-3110

Middlesex Township

1165 Pittsburgh Rd., Route 8
Valencia, PA 16059
Phone: (724) 898-1500

Capitol Office

43 East Wing, PO Box 202012
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2012
Phone: (717) 783-1707

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[Facebook.com/RepMetcalf](https://www.facebook.com/RepMetcalf)
[Twitter.com/DarylMetcalf](https://twitter.com/DarylMetcalf)
[Youtube.com/RepMetcalf](https://www.youtube.com/RepMetcalf)

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