

## TALKING POINTS ON ENGLISH-ONLY ORDINANCES

Local anti-immigrant laws and proposed laws often include “English-only” or “official English” components. These provisions may require official city business, forms, documents, signage, and other communications to be in English only.

- **Learning English is critical to participating in, contributing to, and succeeding in American society.** In fact, 92% of Latinos believe that teaching English to the children of immigrants is very important.
- **English-only ordinances are a bad solution to a problem that doesn’t exist.** Almost every American already speaks English. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 92% of Americans speak English. The vast majority of Americans (215,423,557 out of 262,375,152 – 82%) *speak only English* at home.
- **Government business is almost exclusively done in English.** Studies by the federal government’s General Accountability Office have consistently shown that the overwhelming majority of U.S. government documents are printed in English only. In fact, only about 200 – or less than 1% – of U.S. government documents are published in a language other than English.
- **English-only ordinances would not increase the use of the English language.** Immigrant adults want to learn English, but have few opportunities to do so. All over the country, English language learners face long waiting lists for adult ESL classes, especially in-demand evening and weekend classes. In New York City, for example, English courses are so oversubscribed that last year only 41,347 adults – out of an estimated one million adult English language learners – were able to enroll.
- **English-only ordinances would place the health and safety of all Americans at risk.** By restricting communication with people who are speakers of other languages, these ordinances could weaken the delivery of public health and safety messages that are intended to protect all Americans. If some portion of the community does not receive information that it can understand about immunizations or other health threats, the entire public is at risk.
- **English-only ordinances would make it difficult to respond to natural or man-made disasters.** These ordinances would make it more difficult for local first responders and agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to respond to a pandemic flu, another natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina, or another terrorist attack.
- **Today’s immigrants learn English as quickly as previous groups.** A recent report found that the second generation of immigrants is largely bilingual; 92% of second-generation Hispanic immigrants speak English “well” as do 96% of second-generation Asians, though most also speak another language at home. By the third generation, the pattern is English monolingualism.
- **English-language acquisition is important.** All Americans, including immigrants, understand fully the importance of mastering English in order to achieve the American Dream. English-only policies will not help us achieve this important goal.