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English Only Statement of the Coalition for the American Dream

The Coalition for the American Dream is a Tulsa-based non-profit, non-sectarian, non-partisan, multi-ethnic and multi-racial organization that advocates fair and comprehensive immigration reform.

The Coalition has reviewed each of the bills and joint resolutions presently before the Oklahoma Legislature for 2009 that aim to establish the English language as the official language of the state of Oklahoma. The Coalition opposes these proposed bills and measures because :

1. The Supreme Court of Oklahoma created legal precedent in 2002 when it issued an Opinion in the case *In re: Initiative Petition No. 366, State Questions No. 689*, and which held as unconstitutional an attempt to make English the official state language. The Court held then that the English only Petition, as written, violated Article 2, section 22 of the Oklahoma Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and prohibits the passage of laws which abridge that fundamental right.
2. The language contained in the current versions of the bills is similar to the language used in Petition No. 366 and which the Oklahoma Supreme Court held to be unconstitutional. Specifically, the Court held that “by restricting all government communications to the English language, [the proposed statute] seeks to prevent citizens of limited English proficiency from effectively communicating with government officials and from receiving, when available, vital information about government. This restriction is prohibited by both Sections 3 and 22 of Article 2 of the Oklahoma Constitution.”
3. The current English only bills proposed the legislature are unconstitutional in that they would effectively deny Oklahomans their right to free speech, self expression, the right to peacefully assemble and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances. The Supreme Court of Oklahoma has held that protection of these freedoms is an essential part of the right to participate in self-government. The Supreme Court of Oklahoma held that these rights apply equally to those proficient in the English language and those who are not.
4. Restricting all governmental communications to English prevents citizens who are of limited English proficiency from effectively communication with their government. The current English only bills would disenfranchise segments of Oklahoma citizens by interfering with their ability to access vital information necessary for a self-governing society and cause self-censorship by inhibiting communications with government officials, all of this in contravention of the Oklahoma Constitution.