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TALKING POINTS ON ENGLISH-ONLY PROVISIONS OF ANTI-IMMIGRANT ORDINANCES

- Local anti-immigrant laws and proposed laws often include “English-only” or “Official English” components. These provisions often require official city business, forms, documents, signage, and other communications to be in English only.
- English-only laws are based on the myth that the primacy of the English language is under threat. In fact, more than 92 percent of our country’s population speaks English well, according to the last Census.
- In fact, we can all agree that learning English is critical to participating in, contributing to and succeeding in American society. An overwhelming majority of Latinos – 92 percent – believes that teaching English to the children of immigrants is very important.
- But English-only ordinances do nothing constructive to advance the important goal of English proficiency for Latino immigrants.
- Contrary to false stereotypes, these immigrants are learning English as quickly or more quickly than previous generations of immigrants. But they are hampered in these efforts by poor English language instruction in grades K-12, and a severe shortage in availability of ESL classes for adult learners.
- Instead, these laws interfere with and undermine local government’s ability to communicate quickly and effectively, leaving English language learners and the community at large more vulnerable to threats to public health and safety.
- English-only laws and policies erect a barrier between English language learners and their government, interfering with their ability to petition and communicate with agencies that provide essential programs and services.
- The Supreme Court, in striking down an English-only provision in the 1923 case *Meyer v. Nebraska*, noted that “[t]he protection of the Constitution extends to all, to those who speak other languages as well as to those born with English on the tongue.
- In summary, there is no sound basis in law or public policy for English-only ordinances, which serve only to reduce efficiency in the local government and create an environment that invites discrimination of non-English speaking residents, whether legal or undocumented.