

Editor's Note: The following reply was sent to Katia Parvis-Condon, the NNELL state representative from California. She wrote to President Clinton about her concerns for the proposed English Only legislation.

The White House
Washington

November 7, 1996

Ms. Katia Parvis-Condon
Number 392
23100 Avenue San Luis
Woodland Hills, California 91364

Dear Katia:

Thank you for sharing with me your thoughts on "English-only" legislation.

Everyone throughout the world recognizes that English is the common language of the United States, and I consider legislation such as the English Language Empowerment Act, the Bilingual Voting Requirements Repeal Act, and the Language of Government Act to be divisive and unnecessary.

These measures would have numerous objectionable effects. They would effectively exclude Americans who are not fully proficient in English from equal participation in society, denying them equal access to education, social services, and other interaction with their government and their communities. Restricting the government's ability to communicate clearly with citizens simply because their English proficiency is limited would infringe upon the most basic tenet of participatory democracy — a citizen's right to vote. We would no longer be able to effectively conduct required business in writing with the millions of U.S. citizens, in Puerto Rico and many states, who do not read English.

We are a great nation of many voices. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights serve to unite all Americans and seek to guarantee freedom of speech, representative democracy, respect for due process, and equality of protection under the law. Proposals for "English-only" laws, which would require the federal government to conduct the vast majority of its official business only in English, contradict these principles.

Be assured that I will veto such misguided measures.

Sincerely,

Bill Clinton