

House Bill 4053: *Establish English as official state language.*

House Bill 4053 designates English as the official language of Michigan. While on the surface, this bill appears to be a mere directive to use English in all public records, public meetings, and official local and state government acts. However, using English in these contexts is already a standard practice in Michigan. Why the urgency to enact this law now? Closer examination of the bill unveils hidden, but potentially intentional, messaging that reflects the anti-immigrant sentiment that is sweeping the country. The bill capitalizes on the growing fear that English may not continue to be the dominant language used in Michigan. This legislation is divisive, unnecessary, and inconsistent with federal protections of free speech and equal access.

Although the bill does not directly affect K-12 English learners, its social and political ramifications will negatively impact learners and their families alike. While this bill may not change current practices in education, nor governmental services, it clearly sends the message that *all* people are not openly and warmly welcome to participate in local and state processes in Michigan. Even though current practices conform with the bill, it has the potential to preclude civic participation in the very near future. This bill has the potential to deny or create barriers for our most vulnerable students and families, preventing them access to essential social and governmental services.

There is much opposition to the Bill by religious and government leaders. State Representative Winnie Brinks (House District 76) reminds us that “the U.S. Constitution embodies a spirit of tolerance and diversity, yet this legislation would isolate and marginalize those in our community who may not be proficient in English. We should be focusing on ensuring non-English proficient citizens are able to access educational resources to help improve their English, so that they may fully participate in the life of the community. In addition, we should affirm the rich cultural contributions that a diverse population brings to our state. This legislation would accomplish the opposite. It is for the aforementioned reasons, as well as those provided in your email, that I cannot support this legislation as written.” When addressing the House on February 23rd, Representative Stephanie Chang (House District 6) urged members to consider that “every Michigander deserves to have access to services provided by State departments and agencies in order to make sure their needs are met”.

House Bill 4053 puts our vibrant Michigan history of welcoming and celebrating cultural and linguistic diversity in perilous jeopardy. MITESOL implores legislators to vote no on House Bill 4053: *Establish English as official state language.*