

SESSION OF 2007

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE ON HOUSE BILL NO. 2140

As Amended by Senate Committee on
Federal and State Affairs

Brief*

HB 2140, as amended, would designate English as the official language of the State of Kansas for all public documents and official public meetings. The bill would not diminish or expand existing rights. No state agency or local government would be required to provide documents in a language other than English, but may use other languages at the agency or local government's discretion. The bill authorizes the use of braille in signage and documents, and communication in American sign language to accommodate persons with disabilities.

The bill would require the local entities such as political subdivisions, community-based agencies, migrant worker groups, and refugee resettlement programs designated by the State Board of Regents to offer English language classes, English language training, or citizenship classes for non-native speakers and to seek assistance from listed groups in expanding awareness of the available classes and training.

Background

The proponents of the bill included Representative Don Myers and Representative Candy Ruff, sponsors of the bill, Representative Mario Goico, and Tim Schultz, Director of Government Relations for USEnglish.

The opponents of the bill included Arthur Solis and Phillip De La Torre.

*Supplemental notes are prepared by the Legislative Research Department and do not express legislative intent. The supplemental note and fiscal note for this bill may be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.kslegislature.org>

Neutral testimony was provided by Sandy Jacquot, Director of Law and General Counsel for the League of Kansas Municipalities. Written testimony was provided from Melinda Lewis, Director of Policy Advocacy and Research for El Centro, Inc., and Mike Taylor, Unified Government of Wyandotte County.

The House Committee amended the bill to:

- Clarify that agencies or local governments have the discretion to publish official public documents in a language other than English or to permit a person who does not speak English to use an interpreter to communicate at an official public meeting;
- Authorize the use of braille in signage and documents, and communication in American sign language to accommodate persons with disabilities;
- Delete the section providing for standing to sue for the enforcement of this Act;
- Clarify that this Act does not diminish or expand existing rights; and
- Require the local entities such as political subdivisions, community-based agencies, migrant worker groups, and refugee resettlement programs designated by the Kansas State Department of Education to offer English language classes, training, or other educational services for non-native speakers and to seek assistance from listed groups in expanding awareness of the available services.

The House Committee of the Whole amended the bill to make the State Board of Regents, rather than the Kansas State Department of Education, responsible for designating the local entity required to offer classes, training, or citizenship classes for non-native speakers. The House Committee of the Whole

also amended the bill to establish the English as the Official Language Competitive Grant Program to be awarded by the Board. A recipient of the grant would be required to make periodic and special reports as requested by the Board of Regents. The House Committee of the Whole requests the grant would be funded with a \$500,000 appropriation.

The Senate Committee deleted the House Committee of the Whole's amendment establishing the grant program and the \$500,000 appropriation request.

The fiscal note on the original bill from the Division of Budget states that, if a state agency or local government no longer had to incur the cost of preparing and translating documents to other languages, there would be some savings realized. However, such savings cannot be estimated.