



Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

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Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, we urge you to cosponsor H.R. 6617/S. 3334, the "Strengthening Communities Through English and Integration Act." This bill addresses the need to invest in our workforce through English literacy and civics education.

The U.S. is home to millions of citizens and permanent residents with limited English proficiency ("LEP"). Such individuals cannot understand, speak, read, or write English at a level that permits them to interact with government, schools, businesses, medical providers, or emergency personnel. Among the 279 million people in the U.S. aged 5 and over, over 19 percent (54.8 million) speak a language other than English at home.¹ Estimates of the number of LEP people range from 11 million to 21 million people.²

The rights of LEPs are recognized under core civil rights law. Language is an identifying characteristic of an individual's ethnicity and national origin. Governmental obligations to protect the rights of language minorities have been affirmed by Congress in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974), and the Executive Branch in Executive Order 13166. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, ancestry, national origin or ethnicity. Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act provide the foundation for ensuring nondiscrimination in private employment practices while safeguarding federal programs from discrimination, including services provided to language minorities. In *Lau*, the Supreme Court affirmed a connection between discrimination based on national origin and language rights. In addition, Executive Order No. 13166, issued by the Clinton Administration, affirmed the link between language and national origin. This Executive Order was reaffirmed by the current administration. Furthermore, language rights touch on many key civil rights issues including voting discrimination,³ workplace discrimination,⁴ education, housing, and access to justice.

The "Strengthening Communities Through English and Integration Act" will accelerate the integration of LEP individuals by increasing resources for English language acquisition, civics, and other education programs; providing financial incentives to employers who offer adult education and English programs to their employees; and

¹ *Language Spoken at Home*, 2006 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

² *Language Spoken at Home*, 2006 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

³ Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, enacted in 1975 and reauthorized in 1982 and 1992, applies to language minorities based on Congress's finding that discrimination against language minorities limited the ability of LEP people to participate effectively in the electoral process.

⁴ Title VII of the Civil Rights Act protects workers from employment discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. Employment discrimination against a national origin group includes discrimination based on ethnicity, traits (physical, linguistic, or cultural), and an employer's perception that the worker is a member of a particular national origin group).

"Equality in a Free, Plural, Democratic Society"



empowering communities to bring together key stakeholders to develop local solutions for integrating newcomers. Specifically, the bill would:

- Ensure that children and schools have adequate funding and resources for literacy programs for English language learner students;
- Create tax incentives for employers who offer adult education and ESL programs to their employees; and
- Provide technical assistance and support to local communities seeking to integrate newcomers.

As a country with a rich tradition of integrating immigrants, we must work to bring new immigrants into American society as full and equal partners. We strongly urge you to cosponsor the “Strengthening Communities Through English and Integration Act.”

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Joanne Lin, ACLU Legislative Counsel, at 202-675-2317, or Rob Randhava, LCCR Counsel, at 202-466-6058.

Sincerely,

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Friends Service Committee
American Jewish Committee
Anti-Defamation League
Asian American Justice Center
Farmworker Justice
General Commission on Religion and Race, The United Methodist Church
Japanese American Citizens League
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association
National Association Social Workers
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Fair Housing Alliance
National Health Law Program (NHeLP)
National Immigration Law Center
National Organization for Women
Organization of Chinese Americans
Service Employees International Union
South Asian Americans Leading Together
The Episcopal Church
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Association of Congregations
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union