



PREPARED TESTIMONY OF JESSE TYLER BEFORE CARROLL COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

December 11, 2012

Thank you, members of the Commission, for allowing me the opportunity to testify here today in support of the ordinance that would declare English the official language of Carroll County, Maryland.

My name is Jesse Tyler, and I am a Government Relations representative for U.S. English, Inc, the nation's oldest and largest non-partisan citizens' action group dedicated to preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States.

U.S. English was founded in 1983 by former California Senator S.I. Hayakawa, whose parents were Japanese immigrants. It is currently run by Chairman Mauro E. Mujica, an international businessman who immigrated to the United States from Chile in the 1960s. Our organization currently has more than 1.8 million members nationwide, including 2,505 active members within the State of Maryland and 98 active members within Carroll County.

U.S. English focuses on public policy issues that involve language and national identity, particularly laws like the one we are discussing today, which would make English the official language of Carroll County. Similar legislation has been introduced or signed into law at the Federal, State and local levels throughout the country in the past. In fact, right here in Maryland, Frederick and Queen Anne's Counties both passed Official English legislation in just the past year.

As the language divisions in America continue to grow, I believe there is no better time than now to pass this ordinance.

We should be proud that as residents of the United States, we get to experience a melting pot of backgrounds and cultures on a daily basis. U.S. English would never suggest becoming an "English Only" nation. It is important, however, that in our acceptance of foreign languages, we do not allow America to become an "English Optional" nation. Unless we have a common basis for communicating and sharing ideas, we all lose.

Regardless of background, everyone can recognize that at some point, there has to be a cap on the number of translation services the government, schools, hospitals and other places of business are required to provide.

With more than 145 languages spoken in the State of Maryland, it is unreasonable to provide communications for each of them. Not to mention, it is unfair to those residents who speak languages that are not widely used, for the government to only provide translations in select foreign languages.

The ordinance we are discussing today sends the message that in order to live a fully productive life in America, one must become fluent in English. It does not limit the number of languages an American can speak; nor does it require citizens to speak English in their private conversations. The ordinance simply requires that government functions be carried out in English—with common sense exceptions for health and public safety, trade and tourism, national security and more.

The common argument I keep hearing from residents about this ordinance is that it will make immigrants feel unwelcome in Carroll County. Let me share some statistics that I think demonstrate how, in fact, the opposite would happen. According to the Census Bureau, 94.8% of Carroll County residents spoke English as of 2010. Only 5.2%, or just over 8,000 residents, spoke a language other than English at home. The same data showed that 1.6% of Carroll County residents were unable to speak English less than "very well."

No reasonable person could argue that the 1.6% of residents who are not proficient in English have an advantage. Rather, most of us could agree that learning English would make social and economic sense for these individuals. Those who are not given an incentive to learn English will continue to maintain their current status, knowing that the government will provide them with whatever translation service there is to get them by. This means these individuals are likely to be held back in lower-paying, less stable jobs.

On the other hand, let's look at what enacting English as the official language of Carroll County will do. The exceptions listed in Carroll County's Official English ordinance would allow for the government use of languages other than English for foreign language instruction, in instances of public health and safety, in situations relating to trade and commerce, and more. These exceptions are an effort to make clear that Official English is not going to remove anyone's rights or individual freedoms. Rather, Official English will serve as an added incentive for non-English speakers to learn English so they can better their lives.

In 31 states, legislators have already recognized some form of Official English, in an effort to ensure that non-English speakers receive the message that assimilation and English proficiency are the keys to success in the United States. As far back as 1811, when Louisiana declared English its sole official language, and as recently as 2010, when Oklahoma did the same, states have sent the message that English is the key to a unified America.

In June 2012, U.S. English hired Harris Interactive to conduct a poll to gauge the support for Official English laws among the American people. This poll found overwhelming support—88 percent of respondents agreed that English should be the official language of the United States. Broken down by political party, this included 96 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Democrats and 89 percent of Independents. The results showed support for Official English extends to 89 percent of males and 87 percent of females, and even 83 percent of Hispanics agreed that English should be America's official language. These poll results confirm what U.S. English has long declared: the English language is a bond that reaches far beyond political party and demographics.

Your county ordinance will serve as a balance - it will allow Americans to continue to speak in whatever language they choose in their daily lives, while also ensuring that we are all bound by a common, shared language. It will ensure that all county residents, regardless of their background, will be on a level playing field when it comes to achieving the American dream and enjoying all the successes the United States has to offer.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Board, I thank you again for giving me the opportunity to share my views with the Commission today. The English language is the one factor with the ability to unite us all, and I hope that the Commission takes note of the will of the American people and continues to make strides toward enacting Official English legislation.