

Language, English ^[1]

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State Language of North Carolina - English

by NC Government & Heritage Library, 2017

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In 1987, the General Assembly named the English as the official Language of North Carolina ^[3].

Selection as State Language

The bill to make English the official language of the state of North Carolina was sponsored by Senator Frank Block of New Hanover County, who shared with the House and Senate committees that his grandparents were Latvian immigrants who emphasized the importance of learning English. Block stated that newcomers to North Carolina have an affirmative responsibility to learn English in order to participate fully in society. After fierce debate, the bill passed in the House with a vote of 74 to 25 and became law in July of 1987.

Twenty-six other states have also designated English as their official language. Two states have declared multiple languages: Hawaii has two official languages, while Alaska has twenty-one official languages.

Controversy

There was great debate over the adoption of the bill about whether it was discriminatory against foreigners. Several language societies opposed the bill, including the Linguistic Society of America, claiming it would cause backlash against foreign language learning in schools and the cultural preservation of immigrants. Others, such as the [North Carolina Department of Public Instruction](#) ^[4], viewed the bill as an economic strategy, intended to save costs on making bilingual signs and publications. Legislative supporters of the bill claimed that it was purely symbolic, much like the state flag or state flower, and would have no bearing on government functions. Senator Frank Block, who introduced the bill, left the law's interpretation to each individual faction, stating that "The intent is for English to be the official language of the state of North Carolina, and how each agency sees that is for them to determine."

Shortly following the bill becoming law, the North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles ceased the administration of Spanish and Korean driver's licensure tests, which previously had been requested about 15-20 times a month. Representative Mickey Michaux of Durham quickly introduced an amendment to the law allowing the tests, but the amendment did not pass in the Senate. Eventually, the Senate reached a compromise allowing Multilanguage exams.

North Carolina Session Laws

§145-12. State Language.

(a) Purpose. – English is the common language of the people of the United States of America and the State of North Carolina. This section is intended to preserve, protect, and strengthen the English language, and not to supersede any of the rights guaranteed to the people by the Constitution of the United States or the Constitution of North Carolina.

(b) English as the Official Language of North Carolina. – English is the official language of the State of North Carolina.

References:

"House Panel OKs N.C. English Bill," *Charlotte Observer, The* (NC), June 05, 1987: 4B.

"Language Studies Backlash Feared," *Charlotte Observer, The* (NC), June 28, 1987: 7B.

"License Tests in English Biased Against Foreigners, Critics Say," *Charlotte Observer, The* (NC), August 14, 1987: 2B.

Morrill, Jim. "N.C. Legislators Pack Up - Long Session Ends With Last-Minute Intrigues, Congratulations," *Charlotte Observer, The* (NC), August 15, 1987: 1A.

Pride, Don. "N.C. OKs English Language Bill," *Charlotte Observer, The* (NC), June 25, 1987: 1A.

State language. North Carolina Genera Assembly. § 145-12. 1987.

<https://www.ncleg.net/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/BySection/Chapter...> [3]

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