

that "English is the State language." Proponents of the bill contend that official recognition of a State language is necessary as a symbol to unify our culturally diverse State. Opponents argue that statutory designation of English as the State language is unnecessary and divisive. Based on my own observations around the State, and the telephone calls and letters I have received concerning the bill, I have concluded that enactment of a law to declare English as the State language is, indeed, unnecessary and divisive.

As we are all aware, except for Native Americans, the United States is a nation of immigrants. Many of those early immigrants came to this land with no knowledge of English. At various times in our nation's history, there have been waves of strong anti-immigrant sentiment. In many cases, such sentiment was directed at our parents and grandparents. The immigrants of today see measures such as House Bill 657 as a message that they are not welcome in our State.

The dilemma raised in the debate over English as the State language is how to achieve the goal of accelerating the English proficiency of newcomers to our land who have chosen to settle in Maryland, without attempting to erase their cultural identities. English always has been, and continues to be, the essential language in Maryland. Foreign-born newcomers to Maryland know that our marketplace dictates proficiency in English as a prerequisite to adaptation and prosperity. Establishment of an official language in statute cannot hasten English proficiency.

The stated intent of the proponents of House Bill 657 is to unite the citizens of Maryland with a common language. However, in order to achieve that goal, we must take positive, substantive steps to ensure that our foreign born residents have every reasonable opportunity to learn English. Symbolic measures are unproductive and inappropriate in this endeavor. It is my belief that the preferable legislative approach was embodied in House Bill 1054, which I signed into law on May 18, 1995. In House Bill 1054, the legislature enacted a framework to provide funding for students enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages programs in community colleges in the State. It is my hope that in future years the General Assembly will abandon the divisive, symbolic approach to linguistic unity found in House Bill 657, and instead pursue the same pragmatic course that led to the passage of House Bill 1054.

For these reasons, I have vetoed House Bill 657.

Sincerely,
Parris N. Glendening
Governor

House Bill No. 657

AN ACT concerning

English State Language - Formal Recognition *English*

FOR the purpose of ~~designating the English language as the official language of the State of Maryland; providing for certain exceptions; providing that this Act may not be construed to require the translation into English of any official motto or slogan; and~~