



## TENNESSEE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS COALITION

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*Organizations are listed for  
identification purposes only.*

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010

The Honorable Phil Bredesen  
Governor of Tennessee  
Tennessee State Capitol  
Nashville, TN 37243-0001

Re: House Bill 2685, English-Only Policies in the Workplace

Dear Governor Bredesen:

The Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition would like to express deep concern with HB2685, which amends the Tennessee Human Rights Act to make exceptions for employment discrimination based on language ability. We urge you to exercise your veto and prevent this dangerous bill from becoming law.

Our Coalition has opposed similar legislation for years, concerned it would encourage Tennessee employers to adopt English-only policies in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Last year, this legislation drew the support and testimony from the same network of national anti-immigration groups that funded Nashville's English-only referendum. They argued that Tennessee should lead the way in challenging the merits, authority, and application of Title VII.

In April of this year, my organization agreed to work in good faith with the bill's sponsor, Representative Hill, to craft careful amendatory language that mitigated our concerns. The amended bill closely mirrored Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines on national origin discrimination, making it clear that English-only policies be tailored in scope and not apply to employees on break or engaged in casual conversation with coworkers.

Unfortunately, the sponsor did not honor his commitment to keep this language, and moved a completely different bill out of conference committee. As passed on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, HB2685 is confusing and vague, likely to create needless problems for employees and employers throughout the state. It has the potential to create hostile work environments for bilingual and limited English-proficient workers, and to expose small business owners to unnecessary legal liability.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to veto HB2685.

Very respectfully,

Stephen Fotopulos  
Executive Director