



H.R. 2499 FACT SHEET

- Spanish is the historic official language of Puerto Rico. While English was installed as a co-official language in 1993, Puerto Rico’s legislature and court system are conducted entirely in Spanish, with English translations available only upon request.
- Puerto Rico is exempt from the English language testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind law.
- According to Dr. Yolanda Rivera, Director of the linguistics program at the University of Puerto Rico, the cumulative force of these government policies is that “English is a foreign language in Puerto Rico.”
- English is mandatory in Puerto Rico’s public schools, but it is taught as a *foreign* language. Students rarely receive more than 50 minutes of English instruction per day.
- Fewer than 20 percent of Puerto Ricans can speak English fluently.
- By comparison, Hialeah, Florida has the lowest English proficiency rate of any American city, but the rate is *double* the rate in Puerto Rico.
- It is misleading to say that H.R. 2499 is “non-binding.” Virtually all statutes can be undone by future Congresses, but this bill would have legal and moral force.
- Puerto Rico’s legislature could legally create a referendum without seeking difficult Congressional approval. H.R. 2499 is not a mere resolution, nor does it create a “poll by ballot box.” It would be rightly seen by Puerto Ricans as an invitation to take a step toward statehood.
- Four times in the nation’s history, Congress has confronted the question of statehood for a U.S. territory with a significant and historically rooted non-English speaking population. In all four cases (Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico), Congress required substantial changes in state language policy as a condition for statehood.
- At a minimum, Congress should amend H.R. 2499 to make clear that statehood would require (A) lifting Puerto Rico’s exemption from the English testing requirements of No Child Left Behind; and (B) English becoming the *sole* official language of Puerto Rico.