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The ACLU of Utah Supports S.B. 214 to Repeal the Heart of Utah's Cruel and Harmful “English-Only” Law

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For more than 20 years the ACLU of Utah has opposed the state’s “English-Only” law. Although we filed a lawsuit that placed limits on the law, we remained concerned that its surviving sections would sow confusion and impede local governments from communicating with the public and responding to their needs.

Sadly, our fears became reality. Both before and throughout the current pandemic, we have witnessed the cruelties this law imposes. We have seen government employees from marginalized communities relegated to the roles of interpreters because their agency was barred from spending state funds on translation. We have watched as community organizations and individuals spend countless hours performing unpaid labor because it was unclear if the state could provide these interpretations under the existing law. Thanks to the courage and tenacity of these organizations and their staff, plus the use of executive powers to suspend the “English-Only” law during the pandemic, some of these service gaps were identified and addressed.

But today’s temporary measures are not the permanent solution that Utahns need. S.B. 214 (Official Language Amendments) removes the designation of Utah as an “English Only” state and eliminates all restrictions on use of funding and “official communications” that exist, leaving only the notation that English is the official language of the state of Utah.

We reiterate our 20-year-old promise to the community to continue fighting this harmful law, one that should never have existed. Because we have opposed this exclusionary law for the last 20 years, and we have seen the harm it causes to marginalized communities, we support S.B. 214 today. By passing S.B. 214, which has already cleared the Senate, we can repeal the heart of this harmful and cruel law. We urge all members of the Utah House of Representatives to take this first step to address the harms of the state’s “English Only” legacy and pass S.B. 214. Utahns cannot wait another 20 years.