

New York City and Its Languages

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Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian, French Creole and... English. These are the official languages of New York City, according to an Executive Order recently issued by Mayor Bloomberg.

After over 10 years of struggle by immigration advocates and a number of public officials, New York City will officially become a multi-lingual city! On July 22, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg issued Executive Order 120, which acknowledges that there are at least six languages besides English that are spoken by large numbers of residents. These are Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Italian and French Creole.

According to the Order, all city agencies must translate pamphlets, forms and all essential public documents into the six languages.

To Chung-Hwa Hong, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition, Bloomberg's Order is "a landmark step toward inclusion". Anthony J. Tamburri, President of the American Association of Teachers of Italian and Dean of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute (CUNY) rejoices at what he defines an "unprecedented decision" in relation to NYC citizens of Italian descent.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 15 million American citizens reported Italian as their first ancestry in 2000, one million of whom are able to speak Italian. The 2005 American Community Survey found that Italian was spoken by 800,000 people. Among younger Americans (age 5-17,) 55,000 speak Italian. The vast majority of Italian-speaking Americans live in the New York-New Jersey area. One every two New Yorkers come from a home where the main language spoken is not English.

The Mayor assures that the new rules will represent only a "relatively small" extra cost to the city finances, while giving a true meaning to all the money spent to create and implement laws and regulations. City agencies must submit a detailed plan on how to implement the new rules by January 1st 2009. Once fully implemented, this Executive Order is expected to improve communication between residents and public offices, hopefully diminishing the endless queues in front of every single city bureaucrat's window.

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