

Support for Assembly Bill 2156 (Pacheco): Vital Records: Diacritical Marks

In 1986, during a wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric and sentiment, Californians overwhelmingly passed Proposition 63, which made English the official language of the state. Subsequently, the California Department of Public Health mandated diacritical marks as unacceptable on vital records such as marriage licenses and birth or death certificates. Diacritical marks include but are not limited to: grave or acute accents (è or á) and tildes (ñ), commonly used in Spanish; umlauts (ö or ü), used in German and other languages; and cedillas (ç or ş), found in French, Turkish, and other languages. Per the California Department of Public Health’s Office of Vital Records handbook, hyphens and apostrophes, such as “O’Hare” or “Smith-Jones” are allowed while diacritical marks are deemed “unacceptable entries.” That means the state accepts “O’Connell” and “Smith-Jones,” but not “José” or “Nuñez.”

Diacritical marks signify not only how to pronounce a word or name, but at times can change the meaning. The Spanish surname, Peña, when spelled without the Spanish letter “ñ” becomes *pena*, which means “shame.” The use of diacritical marks effects all communities. They’re used in French, Vietnamese, Filipino, and German names and words to name a few.

MOTION

SOLIS _____

MITCHELL _____

HAHN _____

BARGER _____

HORVATH _____

California is the most populous and diverse state in the nation, and as such, we prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. The acknowledgement of one's name is the starting point for inclusion. This legislation marks a significant step towards recognizing and respecting diverse cultural and linguistic identities within official records, ensuring the integrity and accuracy of all Californians.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office-Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations unit to express support for Assembly Bill 2156 (Pacheco), which allows the inclusion of accents, umlauts, tildes, cedillas, and other diacritical marks on vital documents, giving individuals the right to have personal names spelled and pronounced accurately.

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LPH:cc