



WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE  
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**SHERATON NATIONAL HOTEL SETTLES ENGLISH FLUENCY LAWSUIT**

(Washington, D.C.) The Sheraton National Hotel in Arlington, Virginia, and its parent company, Interstate Management Company, LLC, have agreed to settle a national origin discrimination lawsuit filed by Jesus Romero, a Spanish speaking former employee, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Mr. Romero, who came to this country from El Salvador, worked hard and successfully as a dishwasher for the hotel for 16 years, receiving only positive feedback about his job performance. Despite his limited English, he never had problems communicating with the kitchen staff. The lawsuit was initiated after the hotel terminated Mr. Romero because of a newly imposed English fluency rule for all workers in the hotel, regardless of the individual's job duties.

Under the settlement agreement, Sheraton National Hotel will pay Mr. Romero \$50,000 in back pay and damages, in addition to attorneys' fees. The settlement also contains terms prohibiting the defendant from imposing English fluency rules in the future, requiring the training of management on national origin discrimination and the impact of English fluency rules, and requiring the distribution of non-discrimination policies in Spanish as well as English to hourly employees.

Attorney Carolyn Weiss of the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs said, "This lawsuit highlights the problems of English fluency rules that are not job specific, especially when a growing percentage of the workforce speaks limited English. The settlement reflects appropriate steps that employers can take to ensure equal opportunity for a Spanish speaking workforce." Gerald S. Kiel, regional attorney for the EEOC's Baltimore office, stated, "This settlement provides fair compensation for Mr. Romero and an opportunity for the Sheraton National Hotel to train its managers regarding national origin discrimination and certain scenarios that may breed such discrimination such as English fluency policies. Although the policy in question in this suit is no longer in use, it is important that the hotel take steps to prevent discriminatory policies in the future."

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs ([www.washlaw.org](http://www.washlaw.org)) represented Mr. Romero, along with Richard Salzman of Heller, Huron, Chertkof, Lerner, Simon & Salzman. The EEOC was represented by Stacey Caldwell of the EEOC's Richmond, Virginia office.

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs is a nonprofit civil rights organization that has represented both individuals and groups seeking to vindicate their civil rights for over 35 years. It has handled over 5,000 civil rights cases in employment, housing, public accommodations, and other aspects of urban life.