

Chair Scott Wiggam, Vice Chair Jason Stephens, Ranking member Brigid Kelly, and the members of the State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding House Bill 358, which would designate August 17th as Gene Kranz Day in the State of Ohio.

Ohio has long been known as the “Birthplace of Aviation.” But that phrase goes far beyond a tagline on a license plate. Our state’s role in the evolution of air and space travel and technology cannot be overstated. Consider OhioTourism’s 2019 road trip “To the Moon and Back,” which celebrated our state’s heritage this past summer in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

Native Ohioans such as the Wright Brothers, Neil Armstrong and John Glenn may be household names around the world, but they are only a few of the native sons and daughters that have contributed to the rich legacy of Ohio’s aviation and aerospace history.

Aerospace engineer and Air Force fighter pilot Gene Kranz, a native of Toledo, Ohio may not have achieved the worldwide recognition of Neil Armstrong or walked on the moon himself, but his passion and dedication to our country’s space program played an essential role in the success of NASA’s early missions. As flight director for Apollo 11, he was instrumental in helping to guide our astronauts on their historic journey, and a few years later, as flight director for Apollo 13, his leadership was a critical component to the safe return of the crew after a near fatal explosion severely damaged their craft – a role which earned him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

As a little boy growing up during the second World War, Gene followed the valiant deeds of America’s pilots overseas, dreaming of one day becoming a pilot himself. After earning his degree in aeronautical engineering, he joined the Air Force and earned his wings as a fighter pilot. Following his active duty service, he became a civilian flight test engineer for the McDonnell Aircraft company and later answered a magazine ad from NASA seeking engineers for the Mercury Project. Little did he know that answering a classified ad would take him into the heart of the space race against the Soviet Union and give him a front row seat to some of our country’s most amazing scientific accomplishments.

Gene went to work in flight operations for NASA and was soon made procedures officer and then assistant flight director. He was promoted to flight director in 1965 for the remaining Gemini missions and soon after was made Chief of the Flight Control Division overseeing the planning and procedures for the Apollo program.

Then in 1983 he was named Director of Mission Operations at NASA, a role in which he served until his retirement in 1994.

As the home of the NASA Glenn Visitor Center, Great Lakes Science Center sees firsthand how inspirational the men and women of NASA can be to our future generations. We know that it is important to honor not just the astronauts we see on magazine covers, but also the dedicated engineers, scientists and technicians who are essential to every aspect of making those missions successful. It has been said that the first human to walk on Mars has already been born, but that means so has the first Mars landing flight director, and all of the future engineers, technicians, and scientists who will take humans to Mars. Inspiring children to explore science, technology, engineering and math professions is a key component to the Science Center’s role in the community, and supporting House Bill 358 in honor of Gene Kranz is an important way

the State of Ohio can continue its legacy, so that aerospace innovations are a vibrant part of our future, not just our past.