

My name is Jim Kepchar-Kaminski. I am writing to you in support of SB 261 which would establish a state commission on East European affairs.

I am the North American Representative of the World Council of Rusyns. Carpatho-Rusyns are a people indigenous to the Carpathian Mountains in Europe and live in many countries: Poland, Slovakia, Czechia, Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and the United States. Thousands of Ohioans claim Rusyn heritage as their ancestry.

The Commission would benefit Ohioans in many ways. I am uniquely positioned to speak about one particular aspect: international relations. I work with government officials and agencies as well as non-governmental agencies to educate them on Rusyn matters. This work centers mainly on Rusyn rights in Ukraine where they are not officially recognized as a distinct people. As part of that work, I regularly meet with Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH-09). Rep. Kaptur is the Chair of the U.S. House's Ukrainian Caucus. The establishment of this commission would provide officials with additional resources and further solidify Ohio's important role in shaping U.S. policy regarding East European matters.

I urge all members of the Committee to support this bill.

Thank you.