

Senator Schuring, Chair of the General Government and Agency Review Committee, and all Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of SB 261. First, let me explain that I am a first generation English speaker. My parents were Hungarian (Magyar) immigrants, who taught me the language and customs of their native country: Hungary. Additionally, I am an Honorably Discharged Marine, who served during the Vietnam Era, following in the footsteps of my father's immigrant cousin, who served in the Marine Corps as a translator during the Korean war. I am certain there are other Ohioans like us who have not only contributed to the economy of Ohio, but also to that of the nation.

Allow me to begin by asking you a question. What do a ballpoint pen, a pair of binoculars, a soda water machine, a color TV and the hydrogen bomb have in common? No, the answer is not that they could all be used in war! They were each invented by Magyars (Hungarians). Now, I could go on and on about Magyar inventions that have impacted, not only Ohio, but the nation as well, but I am not here to inundate you with accomplishments of Hungarian Americans. We could be here all day--and no one wants that.

I am here as a proponent of SB 261 and the establishment of an Eastern European Commission in the state of Ohio. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2016 ACS, in 2016 Eastern Europeans accounted for the largest share of European immigrants in the United States at 44%. That was more than double the amount of immigrants who came from Northern Europe and Western Europe combined--each 20%. That is understandable, given the problems associated with Eastern European countries as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union, the egregious acts of the current government in Russia, and the terror threats coming from the Middle East. I am one of more than 1.3 million descendants of Eastern Europeans who reside in Ohio.

My own parents emigrated from their native country and came to America primarily because my father's family settled in the Cleveland area. Since then, of course, my immediate cousins are currently spread across the country. However, after my two year stint in the Marine Corps, I came to the Dayton area with my career Marine husband, who was stationed at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. Having graduated from Wright State University with an Honors BA in English and from the University of Dayton with an MS in Teaching, I spent over thirty years in the Springfield City Schools District as a Language Arts teacher at the high school. In all my years as an English teacher and lover of history, I have always felt that the Eastern European cultures have been under-represented in both the literature and history curriculums. As a result, very few students are aware of the cultures of the nations that comprise Eastern Europe. Even my own grandchildren, unfortunately, have no desire to learn about their heritage because they are not taught about them in school. This needs to change; so many immigrants are arriving from those countries every year, and many are settling in Ohio. As Ohioans, we are compelled to offer a warming and conducive transition, which includes understanding and knowledge of their similarities and differences. We can only accomplish this through the education of our children.

As the former Chair of Springfield's Sister City Committee, I can attest that very little is known about the two Eastern European cities that are connected to Springfield as Sister Cities. Young people--and adults alike--are very familiar with the connection to the two other Sister Cities of Casey, Australia and Wittenberg, Germany. In fact, there are ongoing exchanges with these two countries. However, there is little communication or knowledge about the Sister Cities of Kragujevac, Serbia and Pitesti, Romania. Why is that, you might ask. I believe the reason is that so little is known about Serbia and Romania and the immigrants who speak their languages, that there is very little interest in them. While many cities in northern Ohio have Sister Cities in Eastern European countries, we seldom hear about them. As a matter of record, even Cincinnati has a Sister City

in the Ukraine: Kharkiv. In fact, last March a delegation visited Cincinnati from Kharkiv to seek solutions to childhood poverty. That delegation took back resources from Ohio to try to solve some internal problems within their own country. That is an example of the type of influence that an Eastern European Commission could have in Ohio.

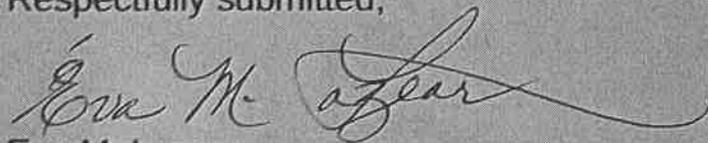
Eastern European immigrants, after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall in the late 1980s, have looked to Ohio as a great asset among American states. They have come to Ohio, not only to preserve their cultures in a state that has significant cultural ties, but also to become entrepreneurs, business owners, laborers, teachers, physicians and other professionals as they assimilated into a democratic culture. It would have helped my parents, for example, if they had had support from such a proposed commission. They could have used its resources to search for jobs, for health care and for re-education.

Desperate to preserve their cultures and their languages, new immigrants formed social clubs such as: the The Russian Club of Columbus, The Czech-Slovak Club of Dayton, the South Slavic Club of Dayton--which encompasses a number of national cultures--the Magyar (Hungarian) Club of Dayton--which encompasses all of SW Ohio--and the Lithuanian World Community in Cincinnati. This list does not include the clubs formed in NW Ohio--of which there are many. As you can see, there are multiple attempts to preserve, educate and connect Eastern European descendents with their heritages.

Each of these heritage clubs would like to have the ability to raise money on behalf of their members for scholarships, job retraining, small business entrepreneurship, study abroad programs, legal aid, and vocational training for immigrants and returning veterans. However, all these take money, and an Eastern European Commission could be the primary organization that handles such resources as materials, money, staff and other assets for effective transitions.

Currently, many people are unaware that there are Eastern Europeans jockeying their way through the "red tape" that comes with National programs, while they try to raise awareness and promote their cultures and their collective needs. I realize that America is a "melting pot." In fact we have heard that consistently through the school years. However, Latin Americans maintain much of their original cultures, the Irish have St. Patrick's Day celebrations shared by many Americans, The Germans have Oktoberfests--again celebrated by all, and African Americans have assimilated some of their cultures into the "American Way." But who will fight for the largest group of European immigrants to preserve what is exclusively "theirs," as they advocate for awareness of specific traditions and for help in doing so. That would be the job of an Eastern European Commission. I ask that you truly consider SB 261--a much needed advocate for many of us of Eastern European ancestry. Thank you for hearing me out, and I am willing to take questions.

Respectfully submitted,



Eva M. Lazear

Secretary of the Magyar Club of Dayton

Czech-Slovak Club Member

Lifetime Member of the Marine Corps League

OEA Union Member

Kiwanis Board Member

ELA Teacher

Tutor of the ACT and SAT

Former President of the Clark County Veterans Commission

Former President of the Springfield Sister City Association