



**Proponent Testimony- House Ways and Means Committee
HB 108- Nonprofit Workforce Reinvestment Act
May 23, 2023**

Chairman Roemer, Vice Chair Merrin, Ranking Member Troy, and Members of the House Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 108.

My name is Zerqa Abid, and I am the founder and volunteer Executive Director of MY Project USA, a nonprofit that I started from my kitchen 8 years ago when I learned about a human trafficking gang trafficking minor Muslim girl from Columbus to Nashville TN and Minnesota. We are now the largest Muslim social Services in Ohio headquartered in the Hilltop Neighborhood on the west side of Columbus.

I was born in Pakistan and came to the United States at age 26 with two children under the age of 5. Even though I am a professional and college graduate, I still found it hard to adjust, both as a woman and as a parent. In 2013, when I learned about local Muslim girls being trafficked by truck drivers as they were trying to run away from parental abuse, it hit me extremely hard. My heart broke for these young women, and for their parents. I dropped all my paid projects as media and marketing consultant and launched the organization on westside.

For those of you who may not be familiar with Hilltop, it is located on the West side of Columbus and is home to thousands of families that are struggling to get by. These include many immigrant families—including thousands of Somali Bantu immigrants—who face significant language, educational, and cultural barriers to success. All the families that MYPUSA serves are living in poverty, many with incomes of only \$6,000 per year. This poverty and lack of hope creates bad outcomes for far too many in the community.

I share my background because it is important to my story. While I had the means and education to prosper as an immigrant, I recognize that many do not, and it is my mission to see the immigrants have the opportunities they deserve and that starts with getting them into the workforce. MY Project USA focuses on what immigrants need to get into the workforce including ESL classes, driving classes, and direct job training. MY Project USA has two social enterprises. MY Community Café, which is a small café located in our Hilltop Youth Empowerment Center on Sullivant Avenue and Global Gifts and Thrift, our thrift store, located on Cemetery Road in the Hilliard Square Shopping Center.

At Global Gifts and Thrift, we proudly offer an international, multicultural collection of gifts, artifacts, decorative items, clothing, shoes, household items and more. This retail location is the

first of its kind in Hilliard. Each dollar spent here will help us feed, clothe, employ and empower underprivileged youth and their families, refugees, unemployed and homeless people. It will help us address drugs, gang/gun violence and human trafficking. It will also help us foster strong girls and women leaders. The individuals who run this shop from donation collection to store set up to inventory to pricing to advertising all the way to sales and customer interactions are immigrants. This store gives them the opportunity to earn a paycheck and valuable work and life skills. I have watched them come here from their home countries not speaking English and not sure where to turn be being the most valuable of employees, committed to their jobs and vital members of not only MY Project USA but to our society. This experience is invaluable, and the Nonprofit Workforce Reinvestment Act will allow us to serve more immigrant and refugee families and allow them to become prosperous.

Over the past eight years in operation, MYPUSA has achieved numerous successes. We have served more than 220,000 individuals through our vast array of programs, provided more than 4.5 million meals and snacks, donated over 50,000 household and clothing items such as coats and other basic supplies to families, and have accumulated over 80,000 hours of community service. Legislation like this allows us to continue to serve our community and put more dollars toward those who need us most.

I respectfully request your support of this important bill.

Thank you.

Zerqa Abid
Founder
MY Project USA