

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, and Ranking Member Ingram, my name is Seleshi Ayalew Asfaw, President and CEO of the Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS). ETSS is a not-for-profit organization helping New Americans to establish roots here in Ohio and facilitate their integration to become self-sufficient and contributing members of our society. ETSS serves over 75 countries around the world and help new arrivals in areas of employment, Health and Wellness, Education for youth and Intensive case management. I am here to testify in support of SB49 -Senator Michele Reynolds RED Bill.

This bill is important to Refugee and Immigrant Community as it impacts the children and the parents in religious ways. I appreciate that the bill will permit students to be absent up to three days for religious and spiritual reasons. This would go in line with religious freedom. This bill will allow students to freely practice their religion without state interference. It will also ensure students will not be penalized for missing class, examinations, and other class work. Students will freely celebrate and enjoy their religious freedom without fear of penalization for missing classes. I believe that school districts should be required to provide an opportunity for students to make up any missed examinations or academic work when they are absent for attending religious ceremonies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony today. I am very grateful for this opportunity. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.