



Senator Nickie J. Antonio

Sponsor Testimony: Senate Bill 142

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 142. This bill would designate the month of April as “Arab American Heritage Month,” to be observed throughout the state of Ohio as a month to recognize the valuable contributions of Arab Americans to our state and to American society.

The idea for this legislation came from Pierre Bejjani, a resident of Northeast Ohio within mine and Senator Dolan’s districts. He is the President of CAMEO (Cleveland America Middle Eastern Organization), a member of the Arab America Foundation, recipient of Crain’s Cleveland Business as *Most Notable Immigrant Leaders* and an inductee of the Cleveland International Hall of Fame, amongst several other prestigious accolades.

The number of [Ohioians with Arab ancestry](#) has more than doubled in the past 30 years. Ohio has the 8th highest population of Arab Americans and one of the fastest growing Arab populations, with over 115,000 people.

To date, the states of Illinois, Oregon, and Virginia have designated National Arab American Heritage Month permanently through legislation. Additionally, Congress,

the U.S. Department of State, 144 proclamations and 45 state governors issued proclamations commemorating the initiative.

During the month of April, the achievements of Arab Americans are recognized through the celebration of National Arab American Heritage Month. Arab-American innovations include the invention of the ice cream cone by Ernest Hamwi and the development of the artificial heart by Dr. Michael DeBakey, just to name a few. In fact, Arab Americans have excelled in every facet of American life, and have been at the forefront of civil rights and social justice. Tens of thousands of Arab Americans have served the United States during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Across the country, cultural institutions, school districts, municipalities, state legislatures, non-profit organizations and public servants engage in special events that celebrate the Arab American community's rich heritage and numerous contributions to society.

It is in that spirit of celebration and recognition of these contributions that this legislation is offered to create an annual celebration to recognize the valuable contributions of Arab Americans to our state and to American society.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 142. I would be glad to answer questions at this time.