



**Assistant Minority Leader
Hearcel F. Craig
15th Senate District**

Health Committee
Senate Bill 131 Sponsor Testimony
Senator Hearcel F. Craig
Senator Steve Wilson
June 11, 2024

(Senator Craig)

Good afternoon Chair Huffman, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Ohio Senate Bill 131. This legislation aims to amend Section 5.2281 of the Revised Code to designate the entire month of April as Ohio Deaf History Month.

The importance of this bill cannot be overstated. Ohio Deaf History Month is currently celebrated from March 13th to April 15th. This period has been historically significant as it commemorates key milestones in the deaf community, such as the founding of the American School for the Deaf on April 15, 1817, the birth of deaf pioneer Laurent Clerc, and the signing of the first law recognizing American Sign Language as a language.

The history and contributions of the Deaf community in Ohio are profound and wide-reaching. By recognizing Deaf History Month in April, we align Ohio's observance with the national celebration, providing a unified time to reflect upon and celebrate the rich heritage, culture, and contributions of the Deaf community.

This change is not just a matter of adjusting dates. It represents our commitment to acknowledging the Deaf community's integral role in our state's history and the ongoing journey toward equality and accessibility. It provides an opportunity for all Ohioans to engage, learn, and celebrate the diversity and strength within our state.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my joint sponsor, Senator Steve Wilson, whose dedication and partnership have been instrumental in bringing this bill forward. Together, we stand committed to making Ohio a place where all voices are recognized, valued, and celebrated.

(Senator Wilson)

Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Johnson, and Ranking-Member Antonio, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 131. While my joint sponsor, Senator Craig, so eloquently explained the importance of this bill and the wide-reaching contributions of the deaf community, I would like to give the Committee some context regarding the legislative history of the bill.

In the 132nd General Assembly, Ohio Deaf History Month was enacted as part of a larger “commemorative-month-omnibus-bill” which passed the Senate 32-0 and the House 94-0. That bill, Senate Bill 27, designated Ohio Deaf History Month from mid-March through mid-April, which, at the time, mirrored the National Deaf History Month dates as established by the National Association for the Deaf.

In the years since Senate Bill 27 was passed by the 132nd General Assembly and enacted into law by Governor Kasich, the National Association for the Deaf has revised the dates in which National Deaf History Month takes place, so that it is exclusively recognized during the month of April.

This brings us today’s testimony before this esteemed Committee. This bill is simple and straightforward – it matches Ohio’s dates with the National dates for Deaf History Month. Members of the Senate Health Committee, my joint sponsor and I thank you very much for your consideration of this bill and the opportunity to provide testimony. We would be happy to answer any questions at this time.