



**Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Ohio New African Immigrants Commission (NAIC)
HB96 Budget Testimony**

May 7, 2025

Good morning, Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of the Ohio New African Immigrants Commission.

My name is Ibrahima Sow, and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of this Commission, whose mission is to advocate for the self-sufficiency of Ohio's sub-Saharan African residents. Our vision is a thriving Ohio where African immigrants have the tools to fully contribute to the state's social and economic growth. I want to recognize the work that our board of commissioners do building self-sufficiency across our great state.

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2019), 16% work in accommodation and food services, arts, entertainment, and recreation; 16% in manufacturing; and 14% in construction. Health services and social assistance sectors also employ a significant portion. Additionally, 33% have a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree, and 12% have some college or an associate's degree.

We come before you today in strong support of the continued allocation of \$250,000 in funding for each upcoming fiscal year. This funding sustains our single full-time staff position and supports essential operational and programmatic costs. Our office is currently a one-room, one-person operation—but we are making every square inch, and every dollar count for over 104,000 sub-Saharan African Ohioans, who represent 18% of all foreign-born residents in the state.

The Commission is charged with over 10 statutory responsibilities, including:

- Disseminating information on the needs and contributions of sub-Saharan African people.



- Promoting their recognition and representation in state affairs.
- Conducting public education and community awareness efforts.
- Supporting leadership training and nonprofit capacity-building, and
- Advising the Governor, General Assembly, and state agencies on the barriers and opportunities faced by this population.

Over the past six months, with clear focus, we have strengthened each of these pillars:

Advise | Public Policy Center

We are serving as a bridge between Ohio's New African immigrant communities and state government. We've facilitated dialogue and coordinated efforts with agencies like Development, the Bureau of Workers' Compensation, and the Department of Health, providing direct input and linking policies to grassroots needs.

Connect | Baobab Resource Network

Our **Baobab Newsletter**, launched this Spring, now reaches more than 200 readers across four counties, and continues to grow. It connects residents to grants, public resources, and highlights model citizens—lifting the voices and contributions of a population too often underrepresented in public discourse. Our very own Senator Reynolds was featured at the end of Ramadan for her work in getting the REDS Act signed into law, ensuring students and parents can celebrate religious holidays without being academically penalized.

Impact | Capacity Building Center

In collaboration with the Ohio African Chamber of Commerce, Ohio Department of Developments Minority Business Division, and others, we just wrapped our **"Driving Our Economy"** virtual entrepreneurship series—equipping immigrant entrepreneurs, many of whom are small business owners, with tools to grow and sustain their enterprises. We were



able to connect with over 20 business owners across 3 counties. Our commission hopes to continue to build capacity through information, resource access, and making connections.

Looking ahead, we are preparing to host the Calabash Forum, a mental & preventative health event focused on how organizations and systems service delivery affect socioeconomic mobility among sub-Saharan African immigrants in Ohio. This initiative, co-developed with university interns, aims to spark collaboration between local health systems, community-based organizations, policy makers such as you, and state partners.

With your continued support, we can not only maintain this momentum but build on it. The need is great.

Thank you for recognizing that even modest investment can lead to meaningful change. I respectfully request your full support for the continued appropriation of \$250,000 per year to ensure our work not only continues.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Ibrahima Sow
Executive Director
Ohio New African Immigrants Commission