



State Representative Rick Carfagna
Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 449
House State and Local Government Committee
November 17, 2021

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. Thank you for affording my joint-sponsor, Rep. Laura Lanese, and myself the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 449. This legislation designates the second Monday in October as Italian Heritage Day in the State of Ohio. This state recognition is meant to coincide with both Italian-American Heritage Month in October – already designated by proclamation at the federal level – and Columbus Day, a national holiday celebrated on the second Monday in October.

Throughout the state, many Italian-American organizations presently organize parades, festivals, and other celebrations during this timeframe. The designation of Italian Heritage Day in Ohio is meant to bestow a date of honor and attention to the countless contributions by Italian immigrants and their descendants to Ohio’s vibrancy. Across Ohio’s economy, from medicine, to business, to construction, to the arts and more, Italian-Americans have helped shape and advance our culture for centuries.

According to the Ohio History Connection, “...just over 11,000 Italian immigrants resided in Ohio in 1900. By 1920, their numbers had soared to 60,658 people. Most of these Italians settled along Lake Erie, especially in Cleveland. In 1870, only thirty-five Italian immigrants resided in Cleveland. By 1920, their numbers had risen to more than twenty thousand people. Most of these immigrants found low-paying jobs in factories, as day laborers, or as waiters, waitresses, and cooks in restaurants. Immigrants who were more successful established businesses that supplied their fellow migrants with traditional Italian products or began their own clothing or construction companies.”

On October 14th, 1922, the S.S. Guglielmo Pierce arrived at Ellis Island. Listed on the passenger manifest as Passenger #29 was my great-grandfather, Ermogeno Saturnino Carfagna, affectionately known as “Sam”. He had \$73 dollars in his pocket, spoke very little English, and it would be five more years until he could send for his wife and children in Italy to join him in this country. 99 years and four generations later, my great-grandfather’s efforts cultivated an 84-year family business and scores of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I wonder if that young man fresh off the boat ever dreamt that one of his descendants would serve in the state legislature?

My great-grandfather's story is the story of us all. Because the American Dream is different for everyone. Whether it's starting your own business, developing a skill, pursuing a career path, owning a home, finding someone to grow old with, or being a parent, the Dream is as small or as large as you want it to be. It's doing whatever brings you personal fulfillment in this world. As we prepare for next week's Thanksgiving holiday, I'm reminded of how blessed I am both to live in a country that supports this pursuit and to serve alongside colleagues like yourselves with your own family histories and incredible stories of struggle, sacrifice, and perseverance.

Chairman Wiggam and members of this committee, this legislation will provide a single-day tribute to everyday Ohioans of Italian descent, who take enormous pride in their ancestry, their faith, and their cherished customs and work alongside all Ohioans to bring prosperity to our state.

Thank you again for allowing us to provide testimony, and at this time I'll yield to my joint-sponsor for remarks of her own.