

October 4, 2021

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Sykes, members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I wish I could have joined this hearing in-person, but COVID and flu has come into my home. As my 1-year-old twin boys and wife recover, I think it's best to appreciate you all from a distance.

My name is Ibrahima Sow, current chair of the Ohio New African Immigrants Commission. A group of 11, members of ONAIC come from academia, business, social service, and other sectors present both the potential African immigrants bring to Ohio's economy and its diversity. I'm from Senegal, on the west coast of Africa. Calling Ohio home for more than 20 years, I was inspired to run for public office after being a page among public servants in the Ohio House.

Having served under public servants like former Speaker Batchelder and others, I've come understand the legislature as a place where advocacy and sound legislation supported. So, having had tried to get the past bills that address the same problem for this commission having gone nowhere has kept us from meeting the obligations set forth by the legislature.

I recently met a wonderful 25-year-old named Lucy. She is a recent arrival to Ohio, an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Coming from a French speaking war-torn country, Lucy comes to Ohio with a bachelor's in finance. Shortly after her arrival, she finds herself unable to secure childcare for her infant, signing up for English classes, and finding employment. She had to rely on people like my wife who she met through friends to plug her access gaps. These access gaps are why ONAIC exists, to help new African immigrants reach self-sufficiency. SB 148 is a monumental step towards the African Commission being able to exercise its mandate and be a resource for families across the Ohio.

The support and passage of SB 148 will ensure we are equipped to apply for and receive grants that impact lives & support social service organizations' capacity. Our peer commissions such as the Ohio Latino Commission & Civil Rights commission for example are equipped with resources to ensure underserved constituencies have access – pursuant to ONAIC's statute – I encourage finance committee members to consider the over 60,000 African immigrants that need this commission to work as intended by the legislature.

Thank you to Senator Sykes for having introduced SB 148 and I humbly ask that this committee support and vote positively on this bill.

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