

Proponent Testimony on behalf of SB 46

Madame Chair and members of the Oversight Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of Senate Bill 46.

My name is David Boston; I am a business owner and Board Member of The Eastern European Congress. I am speaking today as a proponent of this bill, in light of the crisis in Ukraine, and the invasion of Russia into sovereign territory. I am concerned with the welcoming of the influx of Ukrainian—and Russian—immigrants fleeing both countries in fear of their lives, into Ohio. Did you know that there are currently over 45,000 Ukrainians and, as of 2019, over 21,000 Russians in our great state? I am sure there are more by now. This conflict in Ukraine, precipitated by the Russian government and protested by many of the people of Russia, will likely increase those numbers. English is not a commonly spoken language in Ukraine; furthermore only 11% of the general population in Russia speak it.

So, what will happen when these refugees and immigrants arrive in Ohio? Will it be left to the current Ukrainian and Russian populations in Ohio to care solely for them? Will there be a common governmental commission through which they will be able to find homes, secure jobs, learn English and otherwise integrate into Ohio's infrastructure? Currently there is not. That is now of primary importance, considering the circumstances. An agency is needed to address these issues: a government agency to coordinate and facilitate the impact these individuals will

have on the State of Ohio. It is for this reason that I am in support of an Eastern European Commission and an Office of Eastern European Affairs.

With so many lives in jeopardy in Ukraine and Russia, it is imperative that we act swiftly to stabilize Ohio's response to the crisis abroad. A Commission would have the ability to not only integrate those who will surely be added to the population, but also to help them to be an influential component of Ohio's economic sector. Additionally, the Commission will help to expand Ohio's trade interests abroad, once this war has satisfactorily concluded. It will help solidify Ohio's influential role in shaping US policy in regard to Eastern Europeans.

Unfortunately, with all that has been going on in the Ukraine, it is easy to forget what is happening right here in Ohio. It has recently come to my attention that Cleveland radio stations WCPN and WKSU are combining forces and changing their formats as of the end of this month. In doing so, one station will be broadcasting only news, while the other will broadcast classical music. That is not the problem. The real problem is that both the Polish Program and the Hungarian Program—upon which many Poles and Hungarians rely for information about their cultures and countries—are being canceled. Community supported programs like these are in jeopardy because—although these programs fit in with the format they are offering—the coordinators have been told there is no room for their programming. During this “Cancel Culture,” regrettably, our Eastern European cultures are also being attacked and canceled. Now is the time to act! We need a place where Eastern Europeans and their descendants can go to find out the news and about the cultural events that affect their own community organizations.

Such could be the work of an Eastern European Commission and Office of Eastern European Affairs. We definitely need to be on the offensive when it involves Eastern Europe immigrants, their families, and their descendents.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these concerns of the Eastern European Congress of Ohio. I ask you to be sympathetic to our cause and vote to establish the Eastern European Commission as stated in SB 46.

Sincerely,

David Boston
Board Member Eastern European Congress
937-602-1240