



### **PROPONENT TESTIMONY**

SB 261 COMMISSION AND OFFICE OF EASTERN EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
Wednesday, February 12, 2020

Good afternoon, senators,

My name is Dimitrina Partridge and I am the Honorary President of the Bulgarian Association of Cincinnati (BAC). First of all. I'd like to extend my gratitude and the gratitude of the Bulgarian community in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky to Senators Yuko and Rulli for sponsoring SB 261 and thus highlighting the importance of Eastern Europeans in Ohio and their interests. Here are some reasons why we are proponents of SB 261.

Ohio has had a long tradition of Eastern European immigration. If you check the statistics, however, often these immigrants are called Slavic or just European. It is important, however, to note that not all Eastern Europeans are Slavic and that they are more connected through their similar historical past, especially in the period between WWII and the 1990's than their ethnic origin. Exploring their communist past will provide important lessons to all Ohions and educate the children about the dangers of totalitarian regimes and dictatorships. Most of the Eastern European countries have also suffered under long foreign domination, especially under the Ottoman Empire. The BAC is proud to bring attention to the heroic life and work of an Ohio native from New Lexington, Januarius MacGahan, who as a journalist contributed significantly to the Bulgarian struggle for national freedom and independence. The annual MacGahan Festival has been celebrated in New Lexington for 41 years now. We have had the Vice President of Bulgaria attend it but no Ohio government leaders. Another important initiative sponsored by BAC educated the Cincinnati community at large about the role of the Bulgarian people in saving all of its Jewish population (close to 50,000 people) during WWII. Our scientists, artists, and businessowners were very interested in establishing a sister city relationship as a conduit for business investment, economic and cultural exchanges but due to the lack of established channels and support the proposals fell through. SB 261 would be very helpful and facilitate further such economic and intercultural exchanges, and educational initiatives as well as provide government representation.

Many Eastern Europeans are in the forefront of Ohio's scientific and cultural development, and technological innovation. Just in our Bulgarian community we have over 20 PhD holders, numerous people with Master's and Bachelor's degrees. They work as professors at such highly credited institutions as OSU, Miami University, University of Dayton, Xavier University, University of Cincinnati and others. The late Professor Emeritus Viden Tabakoff, PhD was instrumental in the historic lunar landing mission in 1969. His work was continued successfully by other Bulgarians like Prof. Vesselin Shanov. Working selflessly as teachers, architects, IT specialists, doctors and nurses Bulgarians contribute daily to the education and modernization of our region. SB 261 will help them feel better represented and supported by the state.

Like most other Eastern Europeans, we also have an active community dedicated to the preservation of Bulgarian language, culture, food, festivals, crafts, and traditions. For 5 years the Bulgarian Association of Cincinnati has been managing the Bulgarian School Rodolyubie where anyone can learn the Bulgarian language, songs, dances, customs and holidays. We are currently trying to work with the Ohio Department of Education to make Bulgarian part of the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy. The existence of a specialized body like the Eastern European Commission will make similar endeavors much easier and smoother.

SB 261 will also bring a sense of fairness and parity with other communities which have such representation. It will unify and facilitate our efforts to educate the Ohio students about the tumultuous history of Eastern Europe, provide a framework for cultural exchanges and cooperation, and serve as a testament to the contributions of the Eastern European immigrants to the economy, science, and arts of our great state.

Submitted by:

Dimitrina Partridge

Honorary President, Bulgarian Association of Cincinnati