

Testimony in Support of S.B. 261 to Create a Commission on Eastern European Affairs and the Office of Eastern European Affairs for Ohio

February 19, 2020

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Thank you, Chairman Schuring.

My name is Tatjana Bozhinovski, a resident of Reynoldsburg, Ohio. I moved here in 1988 with my parents who wanted to give my brother and me a better life, better opportunities. My father who passed away 8 years ago following a 13-year battle with cancer worked numerous jobs including for a steel company, another as a carpenter. My mother has worked as a tailor for Brooks Brothers for the past 31 years and still going strong. Given my own background and knowing the struggles of what it is to immigrate to another country, I have devoted my professional life helping new Americans and can proudly state that I have helped people from 78 countries going through different processes in Ohio.

On behalf of the United Macedonian Diaspora, the voice of Macedonians abroad in Washington, D.C., with membership throughout Ohio, I am here to testify in support of S.B. 261 to create a Commission on Eastern European Affairs and the Office of Eastern European Affairs for Ohio proposed by the Vice-Chair of this Committee, Senator Michael Rulli, and Senator Kenny Yuko.

According to the Eastern European Congress of Ohio, Ohio is home to over 1.1 million Ohioans of Eastern European heritage. There are an estimated 100,000 Ohioans of Macedonian heritage.

Macedonians started immigrating to Ohio since the early 1900s, fleeing wars, ethnic cleansing under Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian regimes, prosecution, communism, dictatorship, and economic upheaval. They settled in places like Youngstown, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Akron, Lorain, Canton, Mansfield, Massillon, and Columbus. Like many other immigrants, Macedonians worked in the steel and rubber mills, owned their own auto body shops, grocery stores, restaurants, and tailor shops. In 1936, Macedonians opened their first Orthodox Church in Youngstown, Holy Ghost – 84 years ago.

Every Labor Day thousands of Macedonians gather to celebrate our rich Macedonian culture, music, dancing, and food during what we call Macedonian Convention, and Akron was home to one Convention in 1927, Youngstown in 1930, Cleveland in 1932, two in Columbus, Ohio just in the last 5 years – a total of about 40 Macedonian conventions in Ohio that have helped boost the local economies of the cities where the conventions are held, hotels and restaurants.

You have probably heard of the famous Cincinnati chili, or the Coney hot dogs, which in 2013, Smithsonian named as "20 Most Iconic Foods in America." Well,

the Macedonian immigrant brothers Tom and John Kiradjieff using old Macedonian recipes passed down by their parents and grandparents created Cincinnati chili and the famous Coney's.

In 1950, the Macedonian Businessman's Club of Akron, Ohio was formed to benefit the commercial social interests of the business community. They run annual golf tournaments, and weekly meetings, and have provided over \$100,000 in scholarships to Ohio youth.

In the 1950s and 60s, Macedonians fled communism and those settling in Ohio built an additional five Macedonian Orthodox Churches, of which St. Mary Macedonian Orthodox Cathedral in Reynoldsburg is our largest, and our annual Macedonian festival in September draws thousands of attendees. Thank you to Laurel Tombazzi of the Eastern European Congress of Ohio for mentioning our cathedral during her testimony last week.

While I have the opportunity I wanted to mention a few notable Ohio Macedonians:

Pandel Savic who fought for his adopted and beloved country as a United States Marine in the South Pacific during World War II before attending The Ohio State University. While at OSU, Pandel quarterbacked the Buckeyes to their first Rose Bowl victory in 1950. He was one of the founding members of Muirfield Village Golf Club and served as general chairman of the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide for more than 30 years, helping the Memorial become one of the premier stops on the PGA TOUR. Pandel was inducted into the Ohio State Hall of Fame in 2009.

Peter George who won three Olympic medals for the U.S. in weightlifting, five world championships, and was the middleweight champion at the Pan-American Games. He later went on to become a doctor in oral medicine and pioneered treatments for obstructive sleep apnea.

Louis and George Nanchoff brothers played soccer for the U.S. national team, earning first-team All-American honors in 1976.

Vlade Janakievski a former American football placekicker for the Ohio State Buckeyes. Janakievski finished his Buckeye career second on the Ohio State's all-time scoring list (behind Pete Johnson), with 179 career points. He was selected to the Ohio State Football All-Century Team in 2000 and was inducted into the Ohio State Varsity "O" Hall of Fame in 2004. You may know him if you have stopped at Easy Living Deli, which he owns and operates.

Mike Vrabel who played football for Ohio State, Pittsburgh Steelers, New England Patriots, and the Kansas City Chiefs. He was named to the Ohio State

Football All-Century Team in 2000, and in 2012 was inducted into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame.

Last but not least, we have Cedi Osman, born in Macedonia and currently plays basketball for the Cleveland Cavaliers.

As you can tell, Ohio Macedonians are really good at sports.

We also have Dr. Boris Karanfilov who established and runs the Ohio Sinus Center and is the most experienced fellowship-trained sinus surgeon in Columbus, Ohio. And the Akron-based Dr. Jovan Laskovski, who was inducted into the International Society for Hip Arthroscopy in 2013 and became one of 26 surgeons in the United States inducted into ISHA.

Two more people that I also want to draw to your attention are Judge Phil Naumoff of Mansfield, who was elected to the bench in November 2018, and Ljubica Acevska, raised in Mansfield, went to Ohio State, who established bilateral relations between the United States and Macedonia and became Macedonia's first Ambassador to the United States and served in that role for nearly a decade.

Today, Ohio Macedonians partake in all walks of life, business leaders, lawyers, real estate investors, and agents, accountants, doctors, fashion designers, judges, public servants, police officers, and teachers. Ohio is richer because of all Eastern Europeans including Macedonians.

The Commission on Eastern European Affairs would greatly benefit the Macedonian community in Ohio as well, and we are fully supportive of Senator Rulli and Yuko's efforts. We hope that you will pass S.B. 261 as soon as possible.