



**EASTERN  
EUROPEAN  
CONGRESS**  
*of* **OHIO**


Proponent Testimony  
Create Office and  
Commission on Eastern European Affairs  
Ohio Senate Bill 46

THANK YOU MR. CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE.

MY NAME IS LAUREL TOMBAZZI, CHAIR OF THE EASTERN EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF OHIO.

10% OF OHIO'S POPULATION HAS EASTERN EUROPEAN HERITAGE. ONE OUT OF TEN PEOPLE, ONE OUT OF TEN VOTING, ONE OUT OF TEN IN SCHOOLS & BUSINESS IS EASTERN EUROPEAN. THE LARGEST EASTERN EUROPEAN POPULATIONS IN OHIO ARE POLISH, HUNGARIAN AND SLOVAK.

IN 2019, A HISTORIC **FIRST** FOR THE OHIO BULGARIAN COMMUNITY TOOK PLACE. THE **FIRST** HONORARY CONSUL FOR THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA WAS NAMED. THERE WAS A CEREMONIAL EVENT THAT TOOK PLACE IN SOUTHERN OHIO. US AND OH SENATORS, OH HOUSE REPS, THE MAYOR OF THE AREA AS WELL AS THE LOCAL CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS WERE INVITED NO ONE SHOWED UP. NO INTEREST, NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY ANY GOVERNMENT LEADERS.



## TESTIMONY COMMISSION/OFFICE

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IT TOOK OVER TWO YEARS FOR OHIO'S OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW AMERICANS WEBSITE TO ADD THE HONORARY CONSUL'S NAME TO THE EMBASSIES/CONSULATES/HONORARY CONSULATES LIST.

IN JUNE 2022, AN OHIO HONORARY CONSUL WAS NAMED FOR HUNGARY, HIS NAME IS NOT ON THIS WEBSITE LIST YET.

BY THESE TWO EXAMPLES, A NECESSARY BRIDGE NEEDS TO BE BUILT BETWEEN OHIO'S EAST EUROPEAN POPULATIONS AND OUR STATE GOVERNMENT LEADERS.

ABOUT EIGHT YEARS AGO, A CERTIFIED OHIO PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER SAID QUOTE WHERE IS UKRAINE? END OF QUOTE DURING THE CONFLICT OF RUSSIA AND UKRAINE. UKRAINE AND RUSSIA HAD BEEN IN THE WORLD NEWS FOR 18 MONTHS YET THIS SCHOOL TEACHER DID NOT KNOW WHERE UKRAINE WAS.

A COMMISSION AND OFFICE WOULD GIVE YOU A BETTER EDUCATED PATH TO WORK ON SOLUTIONS WITH SPECIFIC RESOURCES AND INFORMATION THAT IS MISSING IN OUR STATE GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM.

HOW ABOUT HAVING A LAST NAME LIKE MAHOVLICH OR ZACKOWSKI OR A FIRST NAME LIKE KYRIAKOS OR SVETLANA? NO ONE REALIZES THE TREMENDOUS HUMILIATION AND BULLYING THAT SOMEONE IN OUR SCHOOLS OR IN THE WORKPLACE GOES THROUGH WITH DIFFERENT EASTERN EUROPEAN NAMES.

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TWENTY YEARS AGO IN AN OHIO PUBLIC SCHOOL A FIFTH GRADE STUDENT HAD TO DO A CULTURAL PRESENTATION ON HIS HUNGARIAN CULTURE. AFTER THE PRESENTATION ONE OF THE STUDENTS MADE UP A BELITTLING SONG ABOUT HUNGARIANS AND MADE THE STUDENT FEEL LIKE HE WAS NOTHING BECAUSE OF HIS HERITAGE.

WHERE IS OUR VALUE SHOWN TO US BY OHIOANS AND OHIO LEADERS?

THERE IS A SCENE IN THE MOVIE MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING. THE YOUNG GREEK ACTRESS IS ABOUT AGE 9, THE SCENE IS IN THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA. THE OTHER YOUNG ACTRESS ASKS THE GREEK ACTRESS WHAT'S THAT IN YOUR LUNCH? THE GREEK ACTRESS SAYS IT'S MOUSSAKA. THE ACTRESS MAKES FUN OF THE NAME OF THIS

EXCELLENT TASTING GREEK DISH. THE ACTRESS LAUGHS WHILE THE GREEK ACTRESS IS EMBARRASSED. THE MOVIE GOT IT RIGHT. THIS HAPPENS FREQUENTLY. WOULDN'T YOU AGREE THAT A COMMISSION WOULD HELP ELIMINATE THE ANTI-EASTERN EUROPEAN STIGMA, DISCRIMINATION AND NEGATIVITY THAT WE HAVE IN OHIO?

A COMMISSION AND OFFICE CAN WORK WITH THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO INCORPORATE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT EASTERN EUROPEANS INTO THEIR EXISTING CURRICULUM AND EDUCATE TEACHERS. SO WHEN A STUDENT COMES IN WITH AN ABSENT EXCUSE LETTER ON JANUARY 8 FOR THEIR TEACHER, THE TEACHER WOULD NOT

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SCOLD THE STUDENT BY SAYING QUOTE YOU ALREADY HAD YOUR CHRISTMAS ON DECEMBER 25 END OF QUOTE

THE AMERICAN CROATIAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION STATES THAT IN CLEVELAND, CROATIAN BUSINESSES EMPLOY ABOUT 2,000 WORKERS WITH A GROSS INCOME OF \$300,000,000. CROATIANS GIVE THEIR ACCOUNTABILITY BACK TO OHIO BUT WHERE IS THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF OUR OHIO LEADERS? WE HAVE NO CENTRAL PLACE FOR EASTERN EUROPEANS TO GET HELP IN OHIO.

WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE EASTERN EUROPEAN AND ASHKENAZI JEWISH COMMUNITIES ARE NOT GOING TO BE PASSED OVER BY ANY OTHER GROUPS THAT WOULD WANT A SIMILAR COMMISSION FOR THEIR PEOPLE. CREATING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ONE GROUP WHILE FAVORING ANOTHER IS NOT FAIR.

WHEN SOMEONE ASKS US...WHY NOT THE WESTERN EUROPEANS? WE ARE NOT TAKING AWAY ANYTHING FROM ANY OTHER GROUP OF PEOPLE. VALUE IS ADDED TO EACH UNIQUE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN THE MOSAIC FABRIC THAT WEAVES DIVERSITY AMONG OHIOANS.

UNFORTUANTELY, IN COLUMBUS THERE ARE NO EAST EUROPEAN SISTER CITIES (OUT OF TEN) THAT HAVE A CONNECTION WITH OUR STATE CAPITAL CITY. YET, MACEDONIAN, POLES, CARPATHO-RUSYNS AND SERBIANS LIVE IN THIS AREA.

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LIKEWISE THERE ARE SEVEN SISTER *STATE* CITIES FOR OHIO AND NOT ONE OF THE SISTER *STATE* CITIES HAS AN EASTERN EUROPEAN STATE CONNECTION ON THIS CURRENT LISTING.

WE HAVE AN EXCEPTIONAL GIFT TO OFFER OHIO TO RETAIN AND ATTRACT THE EAST EUROPEAN POPULATIONS IN OHIO, PLEASE OPEN THIS GIFT BY YOUR SUPPORT OF OHIO SENATE BILL 46.

THANK YOU. ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS?

Submitted by  
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Chairperson  
Eastern European Congress of Ohio  
November 17, 2022