



SENATOR KENNY YUKO

Ohio's 25th Senate District

SENATOR MICHAEL RULLI

Ohio's 33rd Senate District

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Senator Kenny Yuko and Senator Michael Rulli February 24, 2020 Senate Bill 46 – Sponsor Testimony

Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing us to provide sponsor testimony on behalf of Senate Bill 46. Working alongside Minority Leader Yuko, Senate Bill 46 was drafted to establish a Commission and Office of Eastern European Affairs. This is a reintroduction of Senate Bill 261 from the previous GA.

The goal of this legislation is to advocate for the over 1.1 million Ohioans who have Eastern European ancestry. A Commission on Eastern European Affairs and the Office of Eastern European Affairs will provide a trusted, reliable, and objective source of guidance on public policy matters affecting these nationalities and other stateless minority cultures. We aim to create an empowered voice for those of Eastern European decent, to speak on behalf of their cultures and their value to the entire state of Ohio.

Unfortunately, the Eastern European region has seen more than its fair share of conflict, ranging from the ravages of both World Wars, through the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and the very recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine. We know that many in Eastern Europe struggled to not just survive, but thrive. That struggle is not ancient history, and continues to this day. Many immigrants still seek Ohio as a refuge. Leader Yuko and I are both descendants of Eastern European ancestors who saw Ohio as an opportunity to build a free and prosperous life. Eastern Europeans are still finding their peace and prosperity here. Our cultures are a fundamental part of Ohio's continued success.

However, we know that the future is bright for our Eastern European communities here in Ohio. We have created Sister City relationships all over Ohio with 22 Eastern European cities from 12 different countries. Cleveland has been a Sister City to Ljubljana, the capital city of Slovenia, since 1975. Cleveland is the proud home to the Slovenian consulate, and city leaders benefit from ongoing trade delegations, visits from Slovenian leadership, and the exchange of knowledge and ideas. Our local and state officials enjoy productive, respectful relationships with the seven Eastern European consulates that have offices here in Ohio. We hope that this new commission will build on these successes, and invest in the continued success of our Eastern European partnerships all over the state. We know that the Eastern European community here in Ohio is vibrant – we see this displayed at community festivals, polka halls, and Slavic language schools from Cleveland to Cincinnati. We want to use this commission to invest in our vital economic and educational partnerships, while nurturing continued Eastern European cultural vibrancy in younger generations.

We see this bill as a way to begin a conversation around how to better serve the many Eastern European Ohioans who have contributed immensely to the success of this state. We hope this Office and Commission will advise and connect their communities with state resources, while cultivating awareness

for the unique needs of those communities. We look especially to the example set by the Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, which has become a respected advisor and resource for the diverse Latino communities across our state.

There are a number of individuals and organizations who will be providing proponent testimony on this bill in an effort to make this legislation the best it can be. We look forward to working with the committee on this bill, and we are appreciative of the opportunity to present this before you all today.

We would be glad to answer questions from the committee, and provide any follow up information should any members require it. Thank you.