
**State Government & Tribal Relations
Committee**

HB 1412

Brief Description: Establishing the Washington state commission on Middle Eastern and North African Americans.

Sponsors: Representatives Farivar, Salahuddin, Simmons, Davis, Berry, Parshley, Peterson, Reed, Gregerson, Thai, Goodman, Doglio, Fey, Berg, Obras, Fosse, Pollet, Ryu, Street, Macri and Scott.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Washington State Commission on Middle Eastern and North African Americans within the Office of the Governor.
- Recognizes the month of April as Middle Eastern and North African American heritage month.

Hearing Date: 1/29/25

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

State Commissions.

State law establishes a variety of commissions under the Office of the Governor, including:

- the State Commission on Hispanic Affairs, originally established in statute in 1971 as the Washington State Commission on Mexican-American Affairs;
- the State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs, originally established in 1974 as the Washington State Commission on Asian-American affairs;
- the Commission on African American Affairs, created in 1992;

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

- the Women's Commission established in 2018; and
- the LGBTQ Commission established in 2019.

Middle Eastern and North African Community.

According to the Census Bureau, in 2020 over 3.5 million people in America identified as being of Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) heritage. The Census Bureau's classification for the MENA population is geographically based and includes Arabic-speaking groups such as Egyptians and Jordanians, non-Arabic speaking groups such as Iranians and Israelis, and ethnic transnational groups from the MENA region such as the Assyrians and Kurds. In 2024 the United States Office of Management and Budget announced that it will revise race and ethnicity data collection practices across federal agencies, including the addition of a new MENA category to the 2030 Census—the first race and ethnicity category change since 1997. This category will include six subcategories: Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, and Israeli, with an additional blank space to allow individuals to specify their own identity.

In 2024 the University of Washington conducted a study to explore the experiences that illustrate how factors such as legal status, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location contribute to outcomes in various aspects of life for MENA communities in Washington. The study defined MENA regions as regions united by shared cultural, historical, and geopolitical characteristics. Included among these regions were, as designated by the University of Washington, the following countries and territories: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The study found that 42,409 people in Washington self-reported as being of MENA heritage in the 2020 Census.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington State Commission on Middle Eastern and North African Americans (Commission) is established in the Office of the Governor. The Commission will consist of 12 members appointed by the Governor. When making appointments, the Governor must aim to maintain a balanced distribution of MENA ethnic, geographic, gender, age, and occupational representation that is, where practicable, proportional to the makeup of the MENA communities in the state. The Governor must appoint an Executive Director of the Commission who has demonstrated expertise in MENA communities.

The primary duty of the Commission is to establish consistent data collection for the MENA community including education around the Census. Other duties include advising state agencies and the Legislature on policies and programs focusing on the special problems and needs of MENA Americans, and to assist educational institutions and public and private entities with celebrations and promoting awareness of major MENA cultural holidays. Each state agency is required to provide appropriate and reasonable assistance to the Commission as needed to carry out its statutory duties.

The month of April is designated as Middle Eastern and North African American heritage month.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 23, 2025.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.