
HOUSE BILL 1412

State of Washington

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

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1 AN ACT Relating to establishing the Washington state commission
2 on Middle Eastern and North African Americans; amending RCW 1.16.050;
3 and adding a new chapter to Title 43 RCW.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature recognizes that
6 Washington's strength lies in the diversity of its histories,
7 cultures, and communities. Among these are the Middle Eastern and
8 North African populations who have, over generations, made profound
9 contributions to the state's economic growth, cultural vibrancy, and
10 civic life. The legislature recognizes that Middle Eastern and North
11 African Americans share ancestral, cultural, and historical ties to
12 the regions commonly referred to as the Middle East and North Africa.
13 While these communities are richly diverse in languages, religions,
14 and traditions, they also share common experiences shaped by how
15 others have perceived and categorized them over time. These
16 perceptions have influenced how Middle Eastern and North African
17 Americans are treated and represented in public, social, and
18 institutional settings in the state.

19 (2) The legislature finds that, despite their contributions,
20 Middle Eastern and North African Americans navigate systems that
21 neither fully serve nor see them; a reality further compounded by

1 their historic erasure in public data and decision-making processes
2 across the state. As highlighted in a recent study from the
3 University of Washington Tacoma, Middle Eastern and North African
4 communities continue to face persistent barriers to equity and
5 opportunity, including limited access to culturally and
6 linguistically appropriate health care, economic inequities driving
7 housing instability, underemployment due to unrecognized credentials,
8 and educational systems that fail to reflect their lived experiences
9 or meet their needs. These challenges reflect a need for intentional
10 representation and solutions that are led by the voices and lived
11 experiences of Middle Eastern and North African communities. By
12 addressing these disparities, the state can honor the vital cultural,
13 economic, and civic contributions of Middle Eastern and North African
14 Americans and build a future where all Washingtonians can thrive.

15 (3) The legislature acknowledges that the cultural richness of
16 Middle Eastern and North African Americans is rooted in histories
17 that span centuries, shaped by interactions that have included both
18 cooperation and conflict over time. The legislature further
19 acknowledges that two significant influences on Middle Eastern and
20 North African communities have been the role of religion and the
21 influence of international policies. While these factors are
22 important, they represent only a part of the depth and diversity of
23 Middle Eastern and North African lived experiences. As such, the
24 commission may discuss these influences but shall not focus solely on
25 them.

26 (4) Therefore, the legislature intends to establish the
27 commission to amplify the voices of Middle Eastern and North African
28 communities, advocate for equitable opportunities, and cultivate
29 stronger connections between Middle Eastern and North African
30 Americans in Washington and decision-making bodies. A key focus of
31 the commission will be to improve the collection of data on Middle
32 Eastern and North African Americans to better inform state policy and
33 programs to meet their needs. Through this work, the commission will
34 contribute to a Washington that uplifts and values its diversity
35 while working toward shared prosperity for all its communities.

36 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
37 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires
38 otherwise.

1 (1) "Commission" means the Washington state commission on Middle
2 Eastern and North African Americans.

3 (2) "Middle Eastern and North African Americans" may include
4 persons of Afghan, Algerian, Arab, Armenian, Amazigh, Assyrian,
5 Azerbaijani, Bahraini, Bengali, Berber, Chaldean, Coptic, Egyptian,
6 Emirati, Georgian, Iranian, Iraqi, Israeli, Jordanian, Kurdish,
7 Kuwaiti, Lebanese, Libyan, Moroccan, Omani, Pakistani, Palestinian,
8 Persian, Qatari, Saudi, Syriac, Syrian, Sudanese, Somali, Tunisian,
9 Turkish, Yazdi, Yemeni, and other Middle Eastern and North African
10 ancestry.

11 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** There is established the Washington state
12 commission on Middle Eastern and North African Americans in the
13 office of the governor.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** (1) The commission shall consist of 12
15 members appointed by the governor. After the appointment of initial
16 members, the governor, in making subsequent appointments, must give
17 due consideration to recommendations submitted by the commission. The
18 governor must consider nominations for membership based upon
19 maintaining a balanced distribution of Middle Eastern and North
20 African ethnic, geographic, gender, age, and occupational
21 representation, that, where practicable, is proportional to the
22 makeup of these communities in Washington.

23 (2) Initial appointments are for staggered terms as follows: Four
24 members have three-year terms, four members have two-year terms, and
25 four members have one-year terms. All subsequent appointments are for
26 three years except in case of a vacancy, in which event appointments
27 are only for the remainder of the unexpired term for which the
28 vacancy occurs. Vacancies must be filled in the same manner as the
29 original appointments.

30 (3) Members of the commission must be reimbursed for travel
31 expenses as provided in RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.

32 (4) Seven members constitutes a quorum for the purpose of
33 conducting business.

34 (5) The governor must appoint an executive director with
35 expertise in Middle Eastern and North African American communities.
36 The executive director must have a demonstrated commitment to
37 addressing, and an understanding of:

1 (a) The needs and concerns of residents with ancestral heritage
2 in Middle Eastern and North African countries;

3 (b) Issues affecting the Middle Eastern and North African
4 American community;

5 (c) The promotion of education, civic participation, and
6 leadership opportunities among the Middle Eastern and North African
7 American community; and

8 (d) The need for increased public awareness and public education
9 on issues that are important to the Middle Eastern and North African
10 American community.

11 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) The commission must:

12 (a) Every two years, elect one of its members to serve as chair
13 and other officers necessary to form an executive committee; and

14 (b) Meet at the call of the chair or the call of a majority of
15 its members, but in no case less often than once during any three-
16 month period.

17 (2) The commission may appoint a citizen task force as it deems
18 appropriate.

19 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** (1) The executive director must employ
20 staff who shall be state employees under Title 41 RCW and must
21 prescribe staff duties as necessary to implement this chapter.

22 (2) The executive director and staff of the commission must have
23 experience working in and with the communities served by the
24 commission.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** (1) The commission's primary duty is to
26 lead the statewide work to establish consistent data collection for
27 the Middle Eastern and North African American community including,
28 but not limited to, community education around the census.

29 (2) The commission shall:

30 (a) Examine and define issues pertaining to the rights and needs
31 of Middle Eastern and North African Americans and make
32 recommendations to the governor and state agencies with respect to
33 desirable changes in program and law;

34 (b) Advise state agencies on the development and implementation
35 of comprehensive and coordinated policies, plans, and programs
36 focusing on the special problems and needs of Middle Eastern and
37 North African Americans;

1 (c) Advise the legislature on issues of concern to the Middle
2 Eastern and North African American community;

3 (d) Coordinate and assist with statewide celebrations during the
4 month of April that recognize the contributions to the state of
5 Middle Eastern and North African Americans in the arts, sciences,
6 commerce, and education;

7 (e) Coordinate and assist educational institutions, public
8 entities, and private organizations with celebrations and increasing
9 awareness of major Middle Eastern and North African cultural
10 holidays; and

11 (f) Meet with state agencies at least once per year to discuss
12 issues of mutual concern related to the Middle Eastern and North
13 African American community.

14 (3) The commission may:

15 (a) Establish relationships with local governments and private
16 industry as needed to promote equal opportunity and benefits to
17 Middle Eastern and North African Americans in government, education,
18 economic development, employment, and services;

19 (b) Solicit and receive gifts, grants, and endowments from public
20 or private sources made in trust or otherwise for the use and benefit
21 of the purposes of the commission and to expend according to the
22 terms of the gifts, grants, or endowments; and

23 (c) Adopt rules, under chapter 34.05 RCW, necessary to carry out
24 this chapter.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** (1) Each state agency must provide
26 appropriate and reasonable assistance to the commission as needed in
27 order to ensure that the commission may carry out the purposes of
28 this chapter.

29 (2) Each state agency must consult with the commission on issues
30 directly impacting the Middle Eastern and North African American
31 community in the state.

32 **Sec. 9.** RCW 1.16.050 and 2024 c 76 s 3 are each amended to read
33 as follows:

34 (1) The following are state legal holidays:

35 (a) Sunday;

36 (b) The first day of January, commonly called New Year's Day;

37 (c) The third Monday of January, celebrated as the anniversary of
38 the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr.;

1 (d) The third Monday of February, to be known as Presidents' Day
2 and celebrated as the anniversary of the births of Abraham Lincoln
3 and George Washington;

4 (e) The last Monday of May, commonly known as Memorial Day;

5 (f) The nineteenth day of June, recognized as Juneteenth, a day
6 of remembrance for the day the African slaves learned of their
7 freedom;

8 (g) The fourth day of July, the anniversary of the Declaration of
9 Independence;

10 (h) The first Monday in September, to be known as Labor Day;

11 (i) The eleventh day of November, to be known as Veterans Day;

12 (j) The fourth Thursday in November, to be known as Thanksgiving
13 Day;

14 (k) The Friday immediately following the fourth Thursday in
15 November, to be known as Native American Heritage Day; and

16 (l) The twenty-fifth day of December, commonly called Christmas
17 Day.

18 (2) Employees of the state and its political subdivisions, except
19 employees of school districts and except those nonclassified
20 employees of institutions of higher education who hold appointments
21 or are employed under contracts to perform services for periods of
22 less than twelve consecutive months, are entitled to one paid holiday
23 per calendar year in addition to those specified in this section.
24 Each employee of the state or its political subdivisions may select
25 the day on which the employee desires to take the additional holiday
26 provided for in this section after consultation with the employer
27 pursuant to guidelines to be promulgated by rule of the appropriate
28 personnel authority, or in the case of local government by ordinance
29 or resolution of the legislative authority.

30 (3) Employees of the state and its political subdivisions,
31 including employees of school districts and those nonclassified
32 employees of institutions of higher education who hold appointments
33 or are employed under contracts to perform services for periods of
34 less than twelve consecutive months, are entitled to two unpaid
35 holidays per calendar year for a reason of faith or conscience or an
36 organized activity conducted under the auspices of a religious
37 denomination, church, or religious organization. This includes
38 employees of public institutions of higher education, including
39 community colleges, technical colleges, and workforce training
40 programs. The employee may select the days on which the employee

1 desires to take the two unpaid holidays after consultation with the
2 employer pursuant to guidelines to be promulgated by rule of the
3 appropriate personnel authority, or in the case of local government
4 by ordinance or resolution of the legislative authority. If an
5 employee prefers to take the two unpaid holidays on specific days for
6 a reason of faith or conscience, or an organized activity conducted
7 under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or religious
8 organization, the employer must allow the employee to do so unless
9 the employee's absence would impose an undue hardship on the employer
10 or the employee is necessary to maintain public safety. Undue
11 hardship shall have the meaning established in rule by the office of
12 financial management under RCW 43.41.109.

13 (4) If any of the state legal holidays specified in this section
14 are also federal legal holidays but observed on different dates, only
15 the state legal holidays are recognized as a paid legal holiday for
16 employees of the state and its political subdivisions. However, for
17 port districts and the law enforcement and public transit employees
18 of municipal corporations, either the federal or the state legal
19 holiday is recognized as a paid legal holiday, but in no case may
20 both holidays be recognized as a paid legal holiday for employees.

21 (5) Whenever any state legal holiday:

22 (a) Other than Sunday, falls upon a Sunday, the following Monday
23 is the legal holiday; or

24 (b) Falls upon a Saturday, the preceding Friday is the legal
25 holiday.

26 (6) Nothing in this section may be construed to have the effect
27 of adding or deleting the number of paid holidays provided for in an
28 agreement between employees and employers of political subdivisions
29 of the state or as established by ordinance or resolution of the
30 local government legislative authority.

31 (7) The legislature declares that the following (~~days~~) are
32 recognized as provided in this subsection, but may not be considered
33 legal holidays for any purpose:

34 (a) The thirteenth day of January, recognized as Korean-American
35 day;

36 (b) The twelfth day of October, recognized as Columbus day;

37 (c) The ninth day of April, recognized as former prisoner of war
38 recognition day;

39 (d) The twenty-sixth day of January, recognized as Washington
40 army and air national guard day;

- 1 (e) The seventh day of August, recognized as purple heart
2 recipient recognition day;
- 3 (f) The second Sunday in October, recognized as Washington state
4 children's day;
- 5 (g) The sixteenth day of April, recognized as Mother Joseph day;
- 6 (h) The fourth day of September, recognized as Marcus Whitman
7 day;
- 8 (i) The seventh day of December, recognized as Pearl Harbor
9 remembrance day;
- 10 (j) The twenty-seventh day of July, recognized as national Korean
11 war veterans armistice day;
- 12 (k) The nineteenth day of February, recognized as civil liberties
13 day of remembrance;
- 14 (l) The thirtieth day of March, recognized as welcome home
15 Vietnam veterans day;
- 16 (m) The eleventh day of January, recognized as human trafficking
17 awareness day;
- 18 (n) The thirty-first day of March, recognized as Cesar Chavez
19 day;
- 20 (o) The tenth day of April, recognized as Dolores Huerta day;
- 21 (p) The fourth Saturday of September, recognized as public lands
22 day;
- 23 (q) The eighteenth day of December, recognized as blood donor
24 day;
- 25 (r) The fifteenth day of May, recognized as water safety day;
- 26 (s) The ninth day of March, recognized as Billy Frank Jr. day;
- 27 ((and))
- 28 (t) The date corresponding with the second new moon following the
29 winter solstice, or the third new moon following the winter solstice
30 should an intercalary month intervene, recognized as the lunar new
31 year; and
- 32 (u) The month of April, recognized as Middle Eastern and North
33 African American heritage month.

34 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 10.** Sections 1 through 8 of this act
35 constitute a new chapter in Title 43 RCW.

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