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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1412**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** House State Government & Tribal Relations (originally sponsored by Representatives Farivar, Salahuddin, Simmons, Davis, Berry, Parshley, Peterson, Reed, Gregerson, Thai, Goodman, Doglio, Fey, Berg, Obras, Fosse, Pollet, Ryu, Street, Macri, and Scott)

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

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

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

(2) The legislature finds that, despite their contributions, Middle Eastern and North African Americans navigate systems that neither fully serve nor see them; a reality further compounded by their historic erasure in public data and decision-making processes across the state. As highlighted in a recent study from the University of Washington Tacoma, Middle Eastern and North African communities continue to face persistent barriers to equity and opportunity, including limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate health care, economic inequities driving housing instability, underemployment due to unrecognized credentials, and educational systems that fail to reflect their lived experiences or meet their needs. These challenges reflect a need for intentional representation and solutions that are led by the voices and lived experiences of Middle Eastern and North African communities. By addressing these disparities, the state can honor the vital cultural, economic, and civic contributions of Middle Eastern and North African Americans and build a future where all Washingtonians can thrive.

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

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The definition in this section applies throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

"Commission" means the Washington state commission on Middle Eastern and North African Americans.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The Washington state commission on Middle Eastern and North African Americans is established in the office of the governor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(2) The commission shall:

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) The commission may:

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

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

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

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

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

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

(1) The following are state legal holidays:

(a) Sunday;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(3) Employees of the state and its political subdivisions, including employees of school districts and those nonclassified employees of institutions of higher education who hold appointments or are employed under contracts to perform services for periods of less than twelve consecutive months, are entitled to two unpaid holidays per calendar year for a reason of faith or conscience or an organized activity conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or religious organization. This includes employees of public institutions of higher education, including community colleges, technical colleges, and workforce training programs. The employee may select the days on which the employee desires to take the two unpaid holidays after consultation with the employer pursuant to guidelines to be promulgated by rule of the appropriate personnel authority, or in the case of local government by ordinance or resolution of the legislative authority. If an employee prefers to take the two unpaid holidays on specific days for a reason of faith or conscience, or an organized activity conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or religious organization, the employer must allow the employee to do so unless the employee's absence would impose an undue hardship on the employer or the employee is necessary to maintain public safety. Undue hardship shall have the meaning established in rule by the office of financial management under RCW 43.41.109.

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

(5) Whenever any state legal holiday:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(e) The seventh day of August, recognized as purple heart recipient recognition day;

(f) The second Sunday in October, recognized as Washington state children's day;

(g) The sixteenth day of April, recognized as Mother Joseph day;

(h) The fourth day of September, recognized as Marcus Whitman day;

(i) The seventh day of December, recognized as Pearl Harbor remembrance day;

(j) The twenty-seventh day of July, recognized as national Korean war veterans armistice day;

(k) The nineteenth day of February, recognized as civil liberties day of remembrance;

(l) The thirtieth day of March, recognized as welcome home Vietnam veterans day;

(m) The eleventh day of January, recognized as human trafficking awareness day;

(n) The thirty-first day of March, recognized as Cesar Chavez day;

(o) The tenth day of April, recognized as Dolores Huerta day;

(p) The fourth Saturday of September, recognized as public lands day;

(q) The eighteenth day of December, recognized as blood donor day;

(r) The fifteenth day of May, recognized as water safety day;

(s) The ninth day of March, recognized as Billy Frank Jr. day; ((~~and~~))

(t) The date corresponding with the second new moon following the winter solstice, or the third new moon following the winter solstice should an intercalary month intervene, recognized as the lunar new year; and

(u) The month of April, recognized as Middle Eastern and North African American heritage month.

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

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