



June 8, 2021

**Re: House Bill 2914**

Dear Members of the Oregon House of Representatives,

We write to express our support for House Bill 2914, which designates April of each year as Arab American Heritage Month. The substantial contributions and rich cultural heritage of Arab Americans have helped us build a better, stronger Oregon. They will continue to do so long into the future. April is a time to honor and celebrate those contributions. We strongly urge your support for HB 2914.

Oregon has one of the fastest growing Arab populations in the country, according to the latest survey published by the Arab American Institute. Arab Oregonians live in at least 28 of Oregon's 36 counties and speak many different Arabic dialects. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Oregon's statewide Arab American population is close to 32,000.<sup>1</sup> Travel Portland estimates that our Arab American population statewide is closer to 40,000.<sup>2</sup> In all events, our community is strong, and only continues to grow stronger.

Across the country, we are a diverse community, 3.7 million strong, of immigrants and descendants of immigrants, who have come from throughout the Arab world. We are Syrians, Lebanese, Egyptians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Jordanians, Yemenis, Somalis, Libyans, and many others. We are from countries across North Africa, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia. We are diverse in our faith, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability.

In Oregon, we have made substantial contributions to our state's rich history and collective prosperity. The late Governor Victor George Atiyeh, Oregon's 32nd governor

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<sup>1</sup> Find more information and statistics at <https://yallacountmein.org/states/oregon>.

<sup>2</sup> For additional information, visit <https://www.travelportland.com/culture/arab-american-community/>.

and the first elected governor of Arab descent in the United States, is one of many—having led our state during challenging economic times, having served as a member of our state legislature for 16 years, and having helped establish crucial statewide environmental, worker, and public health protections.

Nationwide, the contributions of our Arab community led the U.S. Department of State earlier this year to designate April 2021 as Arab Heritage Month.<sup>3</sup>

The history of Arab Americans in our state, and across our nation, unfortunately has been marred by misconceptions, bigotry, anti-Arab hate speech, and violence. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we educate our communities and embrace the Arab culture, dispel harmful stereotypes, and empower the next generation of Arab American leaders. Our families, our students, our young leaders, and our communities will flourish as a result.

We strongly urge you to support HB 2914.

Signed,

Arab American Cultural Center of Oregon (AACCO)  
The Immigrant and Refugee Organization (IRCO)  
Wajdi Said, Muslim Educational Trust  
Greater Middle East Center (GMEC)  
Gus Haddad, Lebanese Honorary Consul Appointee  
Baher Butti, Iraqi Society of Oregon  
Ahmed Alzubaidi, Arabic House in Oregon  
Ruqayya Jarad, Arabic Language Teacher, Lincoln High School  
Mohammad Bader, Interim Director, Multnomah County Department of County Human Services  
Hala Gores, Attorney at Law, AACCO Co-Founder & First President  
Rima Ghandour, AACCO Co-Founder & Past President  
Nadia Dahab, AACCO Board President & Attorney, Sugerman Law Office  
Yussef Fakih, AACCO Board Vice President & Owner, Sesame Donuts  
Peter Esho, AACCO Board Secretary  
Sarah Prevost, AACCO Board Treasurer  
Dana Ghazi, AACCO Board Member  
Taghrid Khuri, AACCO Board Member & Assistant Professor, Portland State University

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<sup>3</sup> Mirna Alsharif, CNN.com, *April is Arab Heritage Month, the State Department Declares* (Apr. 5, 2021), <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/05/us/arab-american-heritage-month/index.html>.

Mona AlBabtain, AACCO Board Member  
Nada Maisse, AACCO Board Member  
Tanya Haddad, AACCO Board Member  
Amer Ben Younes, AACCO Board Member  
Samar Fakih, AACCO Board Member  
Zaynab Atwi, AACCO Board Member  
Zeina Atoui, AACCO Board Member