

HB 3768: Testimony in Support

My name is Shireen Farrahi. I live in Beaverton, am active in the Portland Metro Area Iranian community, and am writing in support of House Bill 3768.

Nowruz, or Persian New Year, is a secular tradition that originated in ancient Zoroastrian Persia, now modern-day Iran, over 3,000 years ago and since then has spread to many neighboring countries and today is celebrated by people of all faiths. It welcomes the arrival of spring and is unique for its core custom of the Seven S's table, which groups seven specific symbolic objects from nature, all beginning with the letter "S" in the Persian language, into a display, usually on a table.

Official state recognition of Nowruz would generate a new angle for the promotion of Oregon's robust agricultural industry, given that every single one of the Nowruz table's seven items, including apples, garlic, sumac, oleaster fruit, vinegar, wheatgrass, and wheat for wheat pudding, is already being produced in Oregon and could start to be marketed to the burgeoning state demographic – as well as national - of immigrant communities from Iran, Afghanistan, and neighboring countries who continue this beloved tradition when they move here. Also, arts-related small businesses would benefit as the demand for bowls, plates, vases, tablecloths, and other accessories could start to be met by ceramic artists, woodworkers, fiber artists, and other folks in the creative community.

Another point to emphasize is that 90% of Oregon wheat is already being exported abroad, with the Middle East as a growing market. In these times of boiling political tensions in that region, it is now more important than ever for Oregon to steady its own trade relationships for such moments of diplomatic unpredictability on the national level, and HB 3768 would be a decisive step in doing that by demonstrating our state's commitment to building warm and stable relationships with these countries by understanding and honoring their cultural traditions, irrespective of the greater national diplomatic landscape at any given time, thus helping to foster peace and prosperity for all.

Significantly, momentum has started growing across the country to recognize Nowruz, as other U.S. states such as California and Virginia have already begun generating their own year-specific Day of Nowruz or Month of Nowruz proclamations. With the passage of HB 3768, Oregon would carry this movement a step further by establishing its own annual recurring Nowruz Day, which would highlight our reputation as a state with a pioneering, independent spirit that is both traditional, yet forward-reaching.

Adoption of HB 3768 would be a simple and cost-free but proactive, diplomatically strategic move that would not only promote Oregon's agricultural clout in a historic way but would also help stabilize trade relationships with certain countries and demonstrate to their respective immigrant populations who have chosen to make Oregon their home that they are welcome here and their traditions honored. Thank you.