

TO:

Brian J. Feldman, Chair

Cheryl C. Kagan, , Vice Chair Kagan, and

Distinguished Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

SUBJECT: Recommendation in favor of HB 0899

DATE: April 1, 2025

Gentlepersons:

I urge you to request your Committee's favorable report on HB 0899, which would establish official Maryland State commemorative months in celebration of the rich cultural heritage of the Muslim and Jewish communities of our state. I write as a member of neither of those communities, but as a Marylander who has represented the United States abroad over a long career as an American diplomat and educator. In my experience, a most important element of what has always made America truly great in our international standing is not only our commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for all, but also our national pride and celebration of our diverse origins as one American people: that is, the motto "E Pluribus Unum" so aptly engraved on our very national currency.

As a Marylander, I find that an important element of our quality of life and our economic and cultural dynamism is exactly the kind of celebration of our extraordinarily rich and diverse heritage that HB 0899 would further strengthen and establish as a particular, proud element of Maryland's State identity or "branding" in a highly competitive world. In so doing, it could only add to Maryland's attractiveness to our fellow Americans and to those from abroad who are considering Maryland as a place to live, raise a family, invest, manufacture, farm, or do any other business; or to visit for study, research, medical treatment, or simple tourism in an environment that is not only naturally beautiful, but also welcoming to all.

Sincerely,

/s/

Francis J. Ricciardone

US Ambassador, ret.

Commissioner, Governor's Commission on Middle East – American Affairs