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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN

SB308- General Provisions – Commemorative Months – Muslim American Heritage and Jewish American Heritage Months

Maryland is home to a number of diverse communities whose histories and contributions have shaped and continue to shape our state. Many of these communities have specially designated commemorative months, such as Irish-American Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and German-American Heritage Month, among many others.

However, certain communities are not formally recognized through statewide commemorative observances, and without these recognitions, Maryland is missing out on unique opportunities for education, awareness, and cultural appreciation. Commemorative months bring public awareness to the beauty of the diversity of our residents by inspiring public institutions like libraries, schools, community organizations, and cultural institutions to celebrate them.

SB 308 requires the Governor to annually proclaim the month of January as Muslim American Heritage month and the month of May as Jewish American Heritage month. Both Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans have significantly contributed to Maryland's history and culture, and have shared in the unfortunate circumstance of experiencing a precipitous rise in discrimination over the past few years. By highlighting the contributions, diversity, and history of Muslim Americans and Jewish Americans through the respective heritage months, we can help eliminate misconceptions, expand educational opportunities, and encourage a more inclusive society. As we know, the recognition and celebration of our communities' diversity has been under attack recently, and efforts like this bill strengthen the threads that knit our communities together. At this time, building and celebrating diversity is more important than ever. I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB308.